University of Alberta

A Contextual Study of László Lajtha's *Magnificat* op.60

by

László Norbert Nemes ©

An essay submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Music

in

Choral Conducting

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, an essay entitled A Contextual Study of László Lajtha's *Magnificat* op.60 submitted by László Norbert Nemes in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Music in Choral Conducting.

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ABSTRACT

This writer made first contact with László Lajtha's music while singing with the Liszt Chamber Choir under the direction of Professor István Párkai. In commemorating the centenary of Lajtha's birth István Párkai prepared his ensemble for a lecture recital in 1992 focusing on Lajtha's choral compositions for mixed choirs. The choir performed some of Lajtha's *a cappella* works which had not previously been recorded. Párkai's creative musical fantasy in the performance of these works, previously unknown to the choir or the audience, revived interest in these compositions, which are uniformly rich in musical invention. Soon after this recital, I commenced a close study of some of Lajtha's choral compositions which resulted in the performance of *A hegylakók* (*People Living in the Mountains*) op. 16 No. 2 and later the *Magnificat*, composed for female choir and organ.

Lajtha's secular and sacred choral compositions reveal a distinctive compositional style, albeit developed in the shadow of two eminent masters of modern Hungarian musical art, Bartók and Kodály. Melinda Berlász, a Hungarian musicologist and author of a monograph and several articles on Lajtha's life's work, has argued that "Lajtha achieved a personal and compelling compositional voice and became an independent composer in the newly-evolved Hungarian musical environment, a goal not to be achieved without encountering numerous pitfalls on the way."

Through a stylistic study of selected choral works by Lajtha, and a more detailed study of the *Magnificat*, this paper attempts to show how Lajtha sought to maintain his own style within a politically charged artistic environment, and to assess the degree to which he succeeded, based more upon the quality of his works than the judgement of his contemporaries.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1992 the Lajtha Memorial Committee[1] addressed the following memorial letter to the general public:

> The centennial anniversary of the birth of László Lajtha, an outstanding and important member of the first generation of Hungarian musicians following in the footsteps of Bartók and Kodály, will be celebrated on June 30, 1992. László Lajtha united the spirit of Hungary with that of Europe by artistically synthesizing our folk music with French influences. His scholarly achievement in the field of folk music and dance research was pioneering. As a pedagogue he trained several hundred Hungarian musicians. . . .
>
> His work as a composer and ethnomusicologist gained Béla Bartók's respect. . . . [As] creator of excellent works, the folklorist . . . [Lajtha] was not really recognized in his homeland during his lifetime. His music fell on more understanding ears in Paris, London and in the United States than it did in Hungary, and a greater value was placed on his work by institutions of international ethnomusicological research than in Hungarian circles. Our music culture and cultural life has always been indebted to László Lajtha. The former regime, now vanished, removed him from all of his positions and, had it not been for a few faithful friends, would have deprived him not only of all possibilities of working here, but also of the very means of survival itself.
>
> Almost thirty years after his death in 1963 nothing can be done to change what happened. As a belated recompense we can only evoke his memory and his lasting life's work at this, the centennial of his birth. . . .
>
> . . .We hope that this memorial year will do justice to the long-awaited homecoming of this vast artistic/scholarly heritage, and that after decades of Hungary's self-defeating refusal to acknowledge his life's work, it should find its honoured place in our culture which it so richly deserves. . . .[2]

Lajtha's choral music, partly because of its technical difficulties from both the singer's and conductor's point of view and partly because of its musical language

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[1] The members of the Memorial Committee consisted of distinguished musicologists, ethnomusicologists, conductors and artists, as well as representatives of various musical institutions.

[2] *László Lajtha 1892-1992*, Centennial Anniversary Booklet compiled by János Breuer, (Budapest: Magyar Zenei Tanács, 1992), 5.

and stylistic features generally unfamiliar in twentieth-century Hungarian choral repertory, has also failed to occupy a well-deserved status among the regularly performed choral repertoire in past years. This essay intends to contextualize Lajtha's choral music and describe Lajtha's style through detailed analysis of one of his choral works, the *Magnificat*, a work synthesizing some of the most important characteristics of the composer's other choral works. By doing that, this essay aims at enhancing choral conductors' opportunities both in Hungary and abroad to find the beauty of this neglected repertoire.

After a brief survey of Hungarian music history from the Renaissance through Bartók's and Kodály's activities in the establishment of a truly Hungarian musical culture, Lajtha's relationship to these two great figures of modern music as well as the development of his individual compositional style are outlined. Chapters 6 and 7 of this essay are devoted to a close study of the composer's choral style, based on some of the composer's related writings and an analysis of some dominant features observed in his choral works. This is followed by a discussion of Lajtha's choral activities in chapter 8, as well as a summary of his religious works and historical issues in chapters 9 and 10. The last third of the paper from chapter 10 to 12 is devoted to a detailed analysis of one of his three large-scale choral works, the *Magnificat*.

CHAPTER 1

THE HUNGARIAN MUSICAL HERITAGE

Having flourished during the Renaissance when its royal courts had strong connections with the Italian, French and German musical cultures, Hungary was separated from the European musical community by the Turkish occupation at the beginning of the sixteenth century. After the conclusion of the Turkish occupation in 1699 the musical culture of Hungary became considerably Germanized under the rule of the Hapsburg Monarchy, a process which continued until the end of the First World War. For several decades from the eighteenth century on, Hungarian music was exclusively associated with the so-called "verbunkos" dances[3] imitated in the compositions of Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, and even in Bartók's early compositions.[4] In the nineteenth century, in keeping with the European trend of using native musical languages to create a national style, the leading Hungarian composers such as Ferenc Erkel and Mihály Mosonyi tried to synthesize the "verbunkos" style with the formal and harmonic language of Western European music. This style was also refined by several relatively minor composers, who learned the "verbunkos" style from the performances of gypsy musicians. Thus, it was this musical style rather than the ancient folk music later collected in the villages that came to be venerated as the spontaneous expression of the national soul in the nineteenth century.

Franz Liszt was one of the first composers who was instinctively attracted to this repertoire; he considered it to be the original Hungarian folk music and integrated it into his music. Although urban musical repertoire emerges from the

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[3] *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 6th ed., s.v. "Verbunkos," by John S. Weissmann.

[4] Examples include works such as *Rondo alla Zingarese* from the D-Major Piano Concerto by Haydn, *Divertissement à l'hongroise* by Schubert or Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*, to name but a few.

Hungarian music tradition, it does not fall into the category of folk music which was later collected in the villages by Bartók and Kodály. The generally accepted view held by musicologists is that Liszt erred in his acceptance of that urban music as true Hungarian music; however, because of his stylistic and methodical use of that repertoire he created the basis, for the first time; for Hungarian art music.[5] He was the first of those Hungarian composers who propagated the union of the old and new cultural styles.

In spite of all efforts made by Erkel and Mosonyi to bring the Hungarian national musical culture into existence during the course of the nineteenth century, the musical standard of the country could not match the highest standards of the Western world. In Hungary, the institutions of musical education and culture were almost totally absent, nor was there any social demand for the establishment of an independent musical culture. The quality of Hungary's musical life at the end of the nineteenth century can best be described as "provincial and in many respects colonial in comparison to the dominant German musical culture."[6]

In the opinion of contemporary musicologists writing about this period of Hungarian music development, during the first years of the twentieth century the popularity of Wagner's music reached its climax in Budapest. This feverish adoration was started by a young generation of musical élite whose grandparents used to live in isolation from Western musical culture, and knew nothing of its existence. The concert programmes in Hungary in the early part of this century resembled those of a smaller German city. The concert life of Budapest and the programmes of the Philharmonic

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[5] The issue of Liszt's relationship to gypsy music is dealt with, among others in László Dobszay, *Magyar Zenetörténet* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1984), 308-318; Klára Hamburger, *Liszt Kalauz* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1986), 336-337; Humphrey Searle , *The Music of Liszt* (New York: Dover publication, 1966), 43-45; Bence Szabolcsi, *The Twilight of F. Liszt* (Budapest: Akadémia kiadó, 1959).

[6] György Kroó, *A Magyar Zeneszerzés 30 éve* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1975), 28. Beginning with this entry, all translations from Hungarian into English are my own.

Orchestra included several works by some minor post-Romantic composers.[7] The programme notes were written both in Hungarian and German. Most of the professional musicians in Budapest did not even speak Hungarian or preferred speaking German over Hungarian. Kodály summarized his concerns about German influence:

> In this Germanized musical environment we were filled with the desire for true Hungarian music that was not heard in Budapest, since the official language of music was mostly German. We knew that beneath the surface, Budapest was an old German city. . . . The fact that German musicians were entrusted to play classical music in Hungary had severe consequences in terms of establishing the Hungarian musical culture. . . .The Hungarian song sounded unfamiliar to the performers of classical music. . . . It is our most urgent problem to raise the Hungarian song from its ancient roots and make it artistically equal to foreign music. . . .[8]

Two prominent composers, Bartók and Kodály, initiated the establishment of a progressive Hungarian musical culture. Unlike most of their predecessors, who chose to leave the country and build careers as composers and performing artists somewhere in the West, they both chose to stay in Hungary, although their efforts to form a new Hungarian Music Society in 1911 to promote the cause of contemporary art were not successful. (The first institution to be successfully established for the promotion of new music was not founded until 1932.)[9] The 1920s brought few changes in terms of musical-cultural development. British composer, critic and author, Philip Heseltine, better known as the composer Peter Warlock, who corresponded with Bartók on several occasions, writes the following about Bartók's situation in Hungary:

> . . . if we have been somewhat backward in our appreciation of Bartók's genius, his own countrymen have [not] been any less so . . . . Budapest is one of the last places to go to hear his music-- except at private gatherings. For many years his professional colleagues looked askance at

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[7] Aladár Tóth, "Jegyzetek a Filharmonikusok Idei Műsorához," *Zenei Írások a Nyugatban*, ed. János Breuer (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1978),198.

[8] Zoltán Kodály, "Vallomás," *A Huszadik Század Zenéje*, ed., Fábián Imre (Budapest: Gondolat, 1966), 231.

[9] János Breuer, *Negyven Év Magyar Zenekultúrája* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1985), 35.

> him, and spoke of madness when his name was mentioned, and although this pedantic opposition has now to some extent given way, political disturbances have prevented Bartók from obtaining as much public recognition as he deserves.[10]

Hungarian musical culture was unprepared for the new art represented by Bartók and Kodály's compositions and those of the younger generation. There was no well-established symphony orchestra capable of performing their music until 1923 when the first professional orchestra was founded in Budapest.[11] In various articles, published in *Nyugat (West)*, Hungary's most progressive journal between 1908 and 1941, the music critic Aladár Tóth frequently wrote about the low musical standards of Hungarian orchestras and conductors. Among other things he indicated that Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* could not have been performed in Budapest if it were not directed by a guest conductor.[12] He also pointed out that Bartók's compositions were never actually performed without mistakes when the Hungarian Philharmonic Orchestra played them.[13]

The largest Hungarian publishing company, the *Rózsavölgyi Zeneműkiadó*, apparently showed no interest in the new works of Bartók and Kodály. In one of his letters Bartók wrote that until 1920 only two compositions by Kodály were published in Hungary.[14] It was not until the 1920s, when Bartók's European success both as pianist and composer confirmed his significance in Hungary and led to his receiving commissions for new works to be published by the *Rózsavölgyi Zeneműkiadó*. However, it was still foreign publishing companies that played a more important role in taking up

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[10] Philip Heseltine, "Modern Hungarian Composers," *Musical Times* (March 1922): 165.

[11] Breuer, *Negyven Év*, 16-23.

[12] Tóth, "Jegyzetek a Filharmonikusok Idei Műsorához," 198.

[13] Tóth, "Modern Szerzők a Hangversenyteremben," *Zenei Írások a Nyugatban*, 296.

[14] János Demény, ed., *Bartók Béla Levelei* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1976), 261-262.

the cause of the young generation of Hungarian composers at that time.

The next chapter is devoted to outlining László Lajtha's professional relationship to Hungary's two foremost composers of the period, Bartók and Kodály.

CHAPTER 2

LAJTHA'S RELATIONSHIP TO BARTóK AND KODáLY

Born in Budapest to a music-loving middle class family in 1892, László Lajtha commenced studies first in piano (1907) and later in composition (1909) at the Music Academy. He studied law concurrently at the Budapest University and obtained a doctoral degree in 1913. He studied composition with Kodály in 1909, and in 1910 he studied piano with Bartók for six months. While at the Music Academy he also studied choral singing and choral conducting. After visits to Leipzig (1909) and Geneva he visited Paris several times between 1910 and 1914. In 1913, upon completion of his studies, Lajtha was appointed to the staff of the ethnographical department of the Hungarian National Museum.[15]

As a composer, László Lajtha worked in the shadow of the two great masters of Hungarian music, Bartók and Kodály. When one approaches László Lajtha's artistic career, it is essential to underline the influence of Bartók's and Kodály's art that so closely interacted with his own.

As noted in chapter 1, Bartók's and Kodály's initiative in fostering the idea that independent and modern Hungarian musical culture could be established only on the foundation of true Hungarian musical material did not receive absolute support from either the political and cultural élite of the time or the contemporary generation of composers. However, László Lajtha, the youngest of the three, identified himself from the beginning with Bartók's and Kodály's perspectives. Bartók recognized Lajtha's musical talent quite early and supported his work in the musical circles of Budapest. János Breuer makes detailed reference to the musical relationship of these composers in

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[15] *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 6th ed., s.v. "László Lajtha," by John S. Weissmann and Melinda Berlász, 377.

his monograph on Lajtha.[16] According to Breuer, Bartók supported the young and talented musician in a way that he probably never supported anyone else by being the first to publish folk-songs from Lajtha's collection in 1924, by correcting Lajtha's early cycle for piano and even by commissioning him to write a piano arrangement of his op.3 *Suite for Orchestra*. Bartók also helped Lajtha to obtain a teaching position at the National Conservatory in Budapest in 1919, a position that Lajtha held for thirty years. Later, in 1947, Lajtha became the director of the institution, an appointment that ended in 1949 when the conservatory was closed.[17] Breuer speculates that Bartók also had a mediatory role in the first public performance of a Lajtha composition that took place in May 1919.[18] Because of Bartók's international connections, Lajtha's name and his compositions were introduced in several articles and music dictionaries written about contemporary Hungarian music in the 1920s.[19]

In a letter to Heseltine in London,[20] Bartók wrote that apart from Kodály and Lajtha, Hungary did not have great composers; nevertheless, Lajtha's compositions were not played in the country at all, partly because Lajtha himself did not promote the performance of his compositions.[21] In 1922 Heseltine wrote the following about Lajtha, Kodály and Bartók:

> It is surprising that during the last three years we in England have heard hardly anything of Béla Bartók, Zoltán Kodály and László Laïtha [sic] - Hungary's three most distinguished composers.[22]

[16] János Breuer, *Fejezetek Lajtha Lászlóról* (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1992), 24-38.

[17] *New Grove*, "László Lajtha," 377.

[18] The concert is undocumented.

[19] For example, an entry for Lajtha is found in the 1929 edition of *Riemanns Musiklexikon*. *Riemanns Musiklexikon*, 1929 ed., s.v. "László Lajtha." The English translation of the article can be found in *A Dictionary of Modern Music and Musicians*, 1971 ed., s.v. "László Lajtha."

[20] Heseltine asked Bartók to assist him in writing some articles about new Hungarian music.

[21] Demény, ed., 261-262.

[22] Heseltine, 164.

Lajtha participated in the movement for collecting folk-songs in the early years of the century. It was principally Bartók who stimulated Lajtha to immerse himself in true folk-music of the country.[23] In 1911 Lajtha set out on his first collecting expedition[24] to areas largely unresearched by Bartók and Kodály, areas that are today in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Rumania. It is most probable that Bartók himself mapped out an itinerary for Lajtha. Between 1911 and 1944 Lajtha collected almost 2,000 folk-songs.[25] As an acknowledgment of Lajtha's significant work in the area of ethnomusicology, he was later elected secretary of the musical folklore department of the *Comité International des Arts et Traditions Populaire (CIATP),*[26] founded in Rome in 1932. Also in recognition of Lajtha's activities in collecting and systematizing folk-songs he was appointed secretary of the Folk-Art Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Science in 1929.[27] For his work in the field of Hungarian folk-music he received the Kossuth Prize.

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[23] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 24-25.

[24] Ibid., 24.

[25] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 64.

[26] *New Grove*, "László Lajtha," 377.

[27] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 65.

CHAPTER 3

LAJTHA'S POSITION AS A COMPOSER IN HUNGARY

Despite the recognition of his activities as a folklorist and as a musicologist in the field of folk-music, the contributions of Lajtha as composer nevertheless remained largely unacknowledged during his lifetime. Even after his death, until recent years, little was known or taught about his compositional output.

In Hungary, regardless of the enthusiasm and frequent performances of his music by his students at the National Conservatory, his compositions were rarely played in concerts.[28] In 1913 Lajtha's first *opus*, his op. 1 *Nine Fantasies for Piano*, was printed most probably at his own expense.[29] The leading Hungarian publishing company, the *Rózsavölgyi Zeneműkiadó*, published only four of his compositions (opp.1, 12, 18, 22).[30] His situation as a composer can best be described as lonely and isolated. The reasons are to be found more in the cultural climate between the two world wars, when Lajtha started his career as a composer, and in his personal musical style, rather than in the quality of his compositions. The paragraphs which follow attempt to describe the political-cultural environment of the Hungary in which Lajtha and his contemporaries started to work and compose. His musical style is discussed in more detail in chapters six and seven.

After the prosperous decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the country was fragmented due to the Treaty of Trianon, agreed between Hungary and the

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[28] According to Breuer, between 1920 and 1944 Lajtha's music was played at concerts in Budapest on not more than thirty occasions. János Breuer, "Lajtha-Művek Budapesten," *Muzsika* 11 (1986): 34.

[29] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 27.

[30] These works are: op. 1 *Nine Fantasies for Piano* (published in 1913); op. 12 *Fourth String Quartet* (1930); op. 18 *Second String Trio* (1932); and op. 22 *First Harp Trio* (1935).

Allies in 1920. The country lost vast territories, and was reduced to about one-third of its pre-war size. The political life of Hungary in the post-World War I era was largely dominated by forces which aimed at re-establishing the Hungarian borders as they were before the war. The cultural situation was influenced by this revisionist character of Hungarian political life. In the period between the two wars the leaders of the country endeavoured to subjugate the neighbouring nations, once belonging to the minorities of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, by propagating the cultural superiority of the Hungarian people. According to their point of view, Hungarian culture was the most prominent in Middle Europe, and therefore the mission of the country was to regain its pre-war territories.[31]

According to Gábor Szigethy, a Hungarian historian, promoting national characteristics became a trend in the sciences, especially among those who painted false, but grandiose and shining pictures of their accomplishments.[32] National characteristics were emphasized at festive events, as Szigethy vividly describes, when the upper social classes were dressed in old-fashioned short, fur-lined coats and Hungarian gala dresses with swords at their sides. They feverishly sought out their noble family trees, thus reversing the wheel of history to focus on bygone ages. "Who was your father and your mother?" "Which land did your ancestors possess?" Answers to these important questions helped to determine true Hungarians. As Szigethy remarks, "While every single loud-mouthed idle gentry shouted the words 'who was Hungarian?', the best of the Hungarian intelligentsia asked 'what was Hungarian?'[33] The social élite did everything to break down the progressive thinking of the intelligentsia, who sharply criticised the re-establishment of the privileges of birth while turning the attention of their listeners to

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[31] Mátyás Unger and Ottó Szabolcs, *Magyarország Története* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1976), 320.

[32] Gábor Szigethy, *Ezer Éves Utazásom* (Budapest: Talizmán, 1991), 221.

[33] Szigethy, 222.

economical problems and social differences. The social élite, however, supported the world of noblemen. The works of progressive artists that tended to reflect the true situation of the country were suppressed. This cultural degeneration in the years between the two world wars doomed the best artists of the country to isolation because the official culture of the country reflected the tastes of the artistically uneducated nobility. In such an unpeaceful environment and in a country preparing for war, the social élite refused to accept anything that was progressive and modern. The aforementioned revisionist tendencies of the political élite were what eventually led the country to an alliance with Nazi Germany prior to the start of the Second World War.

Aladár Tóth bitterly describes the cultural-musical situation of the country at this time in an article published in the journal *Nyugat*.[34] According to Tóth, the progressive and intellectual element failed to be a part of the officially-accepted Hungarian music in the 1920s. People preferred gypsy music to new compositions by Bartók or Kodály. Tóth sharply criticized the political élite for polluting the public conscience with mediocre culture. The ruling class promoted its political goals through commissions for "ornamental symphonies, ornamental overtures and ornamental operas" in order to elaborate their festive events, thereby masking the political decline, economic problems and the degeneration of the country.[35]

During the period between the two wars, the officially-recognized composers of Hungary were Ernő Dohnányi and Jenő Hubay, two excellent musicians,

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[34] Tóth, "A Magyar Zene Élet Hivatalos Kalendárioma," *Zenei Írások a Nyugatban*, 397.

[35] One of the most significant figures of the philosophical music aesthetics was Sándor Kovács, who approached the problem of musical provincialism and conservativism in an article published in *Nyugat* in 1918. ". . .the Hungarian nation", he writes, "often sings; sings to itself with a sort of bashful looking inwards. They [the people] do not know what it means to create music and they do not know the social function of music either. They do not know the organized and institutionalized way of choral singing as the Slavic and German people do. In order to enjoy music in a social situation it [the nation] turns to mediators, the gypsy musicians." Kovács sees as an innate characteristic of the Hungarian people to be inward-looking and isolated and this defines the musical situation of the country to a certain extent. Sándor Kovács,"Az Új Magyar Iskola," *Kovács Sándor Válogatott Zenei Írásai*, ed. Péter Balassa (Budapest: Zenemûkiadó, 1976), 277.

both of whose music, however, represented the continuation of the German Romantic musical tradition. Composers such as Bartók and Kodály and also Lajtha represented the opposition to the officially-recognized cultural trends. Lajtha summarized some of the most crucial problems of contemporary Hungarian musical life in his speech presented at the Congress of Hungarian Literature and Art and also published in the journal *Zene* in 1928.[36] He not only blamed the cultural institutions for not providing the necessary financial support indispensable for the operation of the Philharmonic Society but also sharply criticized the contemporary audience for its indifference toward Hungarian musicians and new music in general. Partly because of the lack of financial support given by the government for the performance of orchestral works during the 1920s and 1930s, Lajtha composed mostly chamber works which were premièred by his colleagues and students at the Music Conservatory.[37] Not until the end of the 1930s could he begin to count on the support of foreign orchestras and thus begin to write works for orchestra that would receive a performance.[38]

Despite the neglect that surrounded Lajtha's compositional output in Hungary, he became an international figure, due principally to his connections with the Parisian musical-cultural environment. The greatest and most notable influence of his compositional style (mostly developed after the 1930s) came through several tours to Paris commencing in the years when as a student of the Music Academy. During that time he spent several terms studying in the French capital with the permission of the Academy.

Although he became greatly affected by the music of Debussy in Paris, he

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[36] *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött Írásai*, ed. Melinda Berlász, 2 vols. (Budapest: Akadémia kiadó, 1992), 1:38.

[37] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 93.

[38] It was not until Lajtha was 53 years old (1945) that for the first time in his life he was able to hear his orchestral work being performed. Breuer, "Lajtha-művek Budapesten," *Muzsika* 29, no.11 (1986): 36.

was also strongly attached to the *Schola Cantorum*,[39] the group formed around the activities of the Choir of Saint Gervais (*Les Chanteurs de Saint Gervais*). Lajtha studied with Vincent d'Indy, a professor at the *Schola Cantorum*, who was also an honorary professor of the Hungarian Royal Music Academy.[40]

The most significant event contributing to the popularization of his music in the West came in 1929, when his *Third String Quartet* was awarded the prestigious Coolidge Prize, whose previous winners included Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Martinů, and Hindemith.[41] As a consequence, his *Third String Quartet* was performed in New York, Seattle, Washington, Moscow, London, Paris, Vienna and eventually in Budapest. The quartet was published by Universal Edition in 1931. Also in 1929, the first significant article on Lajtha, written by Hungarian-born American musicologist and professor at Harvard University Otto Gombosi, was published.[42] In that same year Lajtha also became acquainted with Alphonse Leduc, manager of the Leduc publishing company in Paris. The first contract between the composer and Alphonse Leduc was signed in 1930 and the publishing company subsequently played an important role in the popularization of Lajtha's compositions abroad. In 1936 Lajtha dedicated his *Two Choruses*, op.23, settings of poems by Charles d'Orléans, to Monsieur Alphonse Leduc. Lajtha also became a member of the *Triton* society, founded for the popularization of

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[39] A music school directed by Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931) from 1900. D'Indy was mostly inspired by post-Romanticism but also drew inspiration from early music, notably Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony. He consistently tried to amalgamate German counterpoint and Wagner's musical language with the lyric character of French music so familiar in Fauré's and Chausson's modern art songs. "Its [Schola Cantorum] rigorous course lasting up to seven years was based on Franck's doctrine of Bach, Beethoven and the symphony. Palestrina and the Gregorian chant were revered in the religious field, and the modern popularity of the operas of Monteverdi, Rameau and Gluck owes much to d'Indy's pioneering editions and revivals." *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 6th ed., s.v. "Vincent d'Indy," by Robert Orledge, 221.

[40] László Fábián, "Lajtha László Művészete," *Magyar Zene* 4 (1992): 370.

[41] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 107.

[42] Otto Gombosi, "Ladislaus Lajtha," *Melos* 8 (1929): 231-235.

modern music by Pierre-Octave Ferroud. The society turned its attention toward the music of Middle-Eastern European composers and premièred, among other works, two of Lajtha's choral pieces, op.16 (*Two choruses on the poems by Lajos Aprily*) and op.23 (*Two Choruses on the poems by Charles d'Orléans*). Further evidence of his popularity abroad is that the music of Lajtha can also be found in Arnold Schoenberg's personal collection (Schoenberg Archive in Los Angeles) and "in 1955 [in place of George Enescu] he [Lajtha] became the first Hungarian to be elected a corresponding member of the *Institut de France.*"[43]

Despite his success in the West, Hungary remained uninterested in Lajtha's compositional output. It was not until the centenary of his birth in 1992, the year when a monograph on his life and work by János Breuer was published, that the first signs of Lajtha's artistic recognition occurred in Hungary.

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[43] *New Grove*, "László Lajtha," 377. "The *Institute de France* comprises five academies of which the oldest, the *Académie Française* was founded by Richelieu in 1634." The institute today comprises forty members in five sections in addition to ten affiliated members. One of the five sections of *Institute de France* is the music department. It was founded in 1795. The first foreign member was Joseph Haydn. "One of the most important functions of the music department concerns the *Grand Prix de Rome*. . . .One other function . . . is the allocation of funds to the numerous foundations established by the patrons and friends of music." *Encyclopédie de la Musique* (1959), s.v. "*Institute de France.*" A translation of the article was kindly provided by Liz Le Couteur, a friend of the writer of this essay.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL LIFE IN PARIS IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Budapest is a wonderful city and one could easily fall in love with it if it were not for the fact that Budapest citizens live in it.[44]

Endre Ady, the great Hungarian poet, wrote this sharp critique of the Budapest élite who failed to lift Hungary from a state of feudalism and cultural provincialism. He realized the backwardness of his country as a consequence of his several journeys to the French capital. He felt that the country was behind the Western world in terms of developing new modes of cultural expression.

After 1900 many European artists, including poets, painters and musicians, gravitated to Paris. It became the centre for new ideas and style at the beginning of the century. Paris was a revelation to anyone who came from a musical milieu dominated by German music. Accordingly, many ambitious young Hungarian musicians travelled to the French capital, and later told stories about strange musical aberrations in the same manner painters must have done, who on their pilgrimage visited the Hungarian painter Munkácsy's studio in Paris, and became acquainted with the works of Manet, Monet, Sisley, Whistler, Renoir, Cézanne and others. Paris did not bind Hungarian musicians to itself but simply gave them back to Hungary with broader cultural ideas so that they could disseminate the new possibilities in Hungarian music.

With regard to musical styles, several different trends co-existed in France. The multi-coloured nature of French musical style of the first half of the century is vividly described by an aphorism of d'Indy :

French music will turn into what the next musical genius wants it to turn

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[44] Endre Ady, "Kiké Legyen Budapest," *Budapesti Napló*, 26 September 1907, an essay published in Endre Ady, *Péntek Esti Levelek* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1975), 111-112.

into.[45]

The Wagnerian influence was kept alive in France through a group of composers who were disciples of the famous Belgian César Franck (1822-1890). It was at the *Schola Cantorum* that László Lajtha studied the compositions of César Franck and where he learned the language of modern French church music built upon the tradition of Gregorian chant and the so-called Palestrina style. D'Indy wrote:

> Our object is to provide favourable conditions for genius . . . by critical study of musical masterpieces.[46]

By familiarising students with the polyphonic masters and the publications of the Solesmes monks, the *Schola Cantorum* had a great impact on the restoration and improvement of church music at the beginning of the century. The new style of French church music with which Lajtha became familiar in Paris was as yet unknown in the German-oriented musical environment of the Hungarian capital.

The other significant influences on Lajtha's compositional style included the movement of the Impressionist composers such as Debussy and Ravel, as well as the movement that reacted against the Impressionist aesthetic, *Les Six*, some members of which were Lajtha's closest friends.[47] These movements marked the final phase in the emancipation of French music from German influence.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) broke most radically with the Romantic tradition of music by rejecting German late Romantic music. Among the young generation of Hungarian composers, Kodály had been the first to be captivated by

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[45] Darius Milhaud, "Notes sans Musique," *A Huszadik Század Zenéje*, trans. and ed. Imre Fábián (Budapest: Gondolat, 1966),111-119. Further descriptions of French music from the leading commentators of the time include Stravinsky's *Chroniques de ma Vie*, Cocteau's *Le Coq et l'Arlequin*, Krenek's *Conversations Past Midnight*, Bernard Gavoty & Daniel Lesur's *Pour ou Contre la Musique Moderne*.

[46] Arthur Hutchings, *Church Music in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1967), 92.

[47] Berlász, ed., *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött Írásai*, 1:297.

Debussy's music during his visit to the French capital in 1907 when he received a modest scholarship for foreign study tours. As a result of the contact with Debussy Kodály wrote *Méditation sur un motif de Claude Debussy*. The influence of Debussy's music on Hungarian composition is not shown exclusively by the adaptation of some of Debussy's stylistic features, harmonic progressions or structural models but also by some deeper relationships. Through his musical compositions Debussy managed to provide an example to Kodály and the new Hungarian composers of how to become free from the current European musical style, which had by that time become somewhat overburdened with academicism. Kodály was the first person to introduce Debussy's music to Hungary.[48] It was through Kodály that Bartók came to know Debussy's music, "in which he found elements similar to those in the folk music with which he had been working."[49] These elements are primarily the use of pentatonicism and church modes in Debussy's melodies and harmonies. Description of other similarities have been provided in an essay by József Ujfalussy.[50] Ujfalussy draws parallels between Kodály's and Debussy's compositions on the basis of harmonic characteristics such as the use of chords in parallel progression, diatonic harmonic progressions, and similarities between forms exemplified by the variation form. Bartók's devotion to Debussy's art is best proved by the fact that he himself regularly played the French composer's compositions on his concert tours, as is revealed in many of his concert programmes. In a 1918 interview Bartók declared Debussy to be the greatest composer of the century.[51]

Lajtha was most probably present at the scandalous première

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[48] Zoltán Kodály, *Visszatekintés*, ed. Ferenc Bónis (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó,1982), 69.

[49] *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 6th ed., s.v. "Béla Bartók," by Vera Lampert and László Somfai, 201.

[50] József Ujfalussy, "Kodály és Debussy," *Kodály-Mérleg, 1982*, ed. János Breuer (Budapest: Gondolat, 1982), 28-37.

[51] Béla Bartók, "Debussyről," *A Huszadik Század Zenéje*, 223.

performance of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*,[52] presented in front of what from all accounts was a snobbish audience, "deeply décolletaged and embellished with pearls, diamonds and ostrich feathers,"[53] on the 29th of May, 1913. While in Paris Lajtha also heard works by Ravel, Dukas and Florent Schmitt. In his biography he writes about being also present at the first performance of Debussy's *Le martyre de St Sébastien*.[54] The influence of Debussy's style in Lajtha's compositions are most evident in the landscape music. What attracted Lajtha most to the Impressionist composers, and to Debussy's art in particular, was the great variety and colour of his music. Debussy's French style, in Lajtha's opinion, was the alloy of different stylistic effects and was truly international in character. Lajtha also stated that the national traditions were not the dominant features of Debussy's music but rather subconscious principles of his otherwise international language:

> His [Debussy's] art is devoid of the narrow-minded and isolated so-called national style. . . . His style is nourished by freedom and this made him one of the musical revolutionaries of the century. . . .[55]

Debussy, Lajtha wrote, could not accept the pseudo-laws by which official musicians control musical compositions; he hated academic conventions, patterns and customs.

> The essence of his musical revolution is about the marvellous mystery of music. . . . He teaches that everyone has to wage his own struggle. . . . Everyone failed who tried to imitate Debussy.[56]

Lajtha's similarly multi-coloured compositional vocabulary reflects an international, but at the same time a very personal musical language nourished by the folk tradition of his own country, the European musical heritage and the new twentieth-

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[52] József Ujfalussy, "Lajtha László," *Muzsika* 35, no. 3 (1992): 3.

[53] Jean Cocteau, "Le Coq et l'Arlequin," *A Huszadik Század Zenéje*, 76.

[54] Berlász, ed., *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött Írásai*, 1:23.

[55] Ibid., 1:279.

[56] Ibid.

century idioms from the post-César Franck generation through Debussy. Chapter 7, dealing with his compositional style, will illustrate these characteristics.

CHAPTER 5

LAJTHA'S PARIS AND HIS INTERNATIONAL SUCCESS

It was in Paris where Lajtha achieved his first important successes as a composer. In a later interview he speaks about Paris:

> When as a young composer I performed my piano works in Paris, the free cultural air of the city captivated me all of a sudden. Paris was the first city where my compositions attracted the attention of the leading musical circles. Paris became my second home: it was the city where most of my compositions were premièred, where most of my compositions were published, compositions that had not been performed in [Buda]pest.[57]

As a consequence of his regular visits to Paris, Lajtha soon became acquainted with and friends with some of the leading European composers such as Bohuslav Martinů, Arthur Honegger, Jacques Ibert, Darius Milhaud, Albert Roussel, Florent Schmitt, Henry Barraud, Nadia Boulanger, Paul Hindemith, George Enescu and Sergei Prokofiev. Of Lajtha's sixty-nine numbered works, more than forty were published by Leduc, five by Universal (opp. 11, 33, 35, 39, 41), and two by Salabert (opp. 16, 26); only seven works were printed and published in Hungary. It was because of his contract with the publishing company Leduc[58] that several performances of his works took place, first in the French capital and later throughout Western Europe, including Rome, Brussels, Geneva, London, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

With the start of the Second World War, and especially with the political changes in Hungary occurring after the war, however, the promise of further international recognition for Lajtha came to nought. His trips to the West continued for

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[57] Ibid., 292.

[58] Melinda Berlász, "Lajtha László Leduc Kiadóhoz Intézett Levelei I. 1943-1949," *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok* (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézete, 1990-91), 115-131; and Melinda Berlász, "Lajtha László Leduc Kiadóhoz Intézett Levelei II. 1950-1962," *Zenetudományi Dolgozatok* (Budapest: MTA Zenetudományi Intézete, 1992-94), 161-180.

a brief period after the war. Between the fall of 1947 and the fall of 1948, he settled in London, where he was entrusted with writing the score for the film of T.S. Eliot's verse play, *Murder in the Cathedral*, about the martyrdom of Thomas à Becket. The film won prizes at the Venice Film Festival in 1951, including the Grand Prix.[59] Lajtha's *Third Symphony*, composed as part of the film music, was first performed in London in March 1949 by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Adrian Boult. He could not have suspected that upon his return to Hungary he would have his positions forfeited and be deprived of work. In the newly-changed political situation dominated by the centralized power of the Communist Party it was in fact hardly surprising that an artist such as he would be harassed and dismissed from his posts. Deprived of his pension, he had to struggle in adverse financial conditions. Only one or two of his compositions were played in Hungary each year in the ensuing decade. In a letter to Henry Barraud dated 1960 Lajtha complained bitterly:

> They want to shake me in my authority; they try to isolate me. They do not allow me to travel abroad; Hungarian orchestras and soloists are prohibited from playing my compositions on their tours abroad. So far one of the three good orchestras of Budapest has played one of my compositions once each year. It was always a première performance and it was the only occasion when my name was printed on a Hungarian programme note. I have just found out that they will now take even this opportunity away from me.[60]

When in 1949 his application for a travelling visa was refused by the Ministry of Culture he replied with the following words: "I have taken note of it."[61]

Despite the neglect in the following years, Lajtha never ceased his contacts with his friends abroad. His contact with the Firm Leduc, Lajtha's general

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[59] Emőke Solymosi Tari, Introduction to brochure notes for László Lajtha, *Orchestral Works Vol. 5*, Pécs Symphony Orchestra , Marco Polo 8.223671, 1995. Compact Disc.

[60] Melinda Berlász, "Lajtha László 23 Levele Henry Barraudhoz," *Magyar Zene* 34 (1993): 35.

[61] Melinda Berlász, *Lajtha László* (Budapest: Akadémia kiadó, 1984), 66.

editor since 1948, made it possible for him to continue composing and to publish his music outside Hungary. Paradoxically this period created the background for him to write some of his finest and largest compositions.

CHAPTER 6

LAJTHA'S COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

Bartók, Kodály and Lajtha worked concurrently towards a common goal in their search for revolutionary answers to the problem of new art: to create something completely new that was purely Hungarian in its content, to experiment with formal innovations stimulated by the new French musical language. Their musical language was nevertheless not a unified one, primarily because Hungarian folk-music affected Lajtha's compositional style in a different way from Bartók and Kodály. In this respect Lajtha occupied a unique position not only among his Hungarian contemporaries, Bartók and Kodály, but among the following generation as well. As a Hungarian he was at odds with the prevailing fashion, for he spoke the Hungarian musical language in a different dialect from his contemporaries, having been more deeply influenced by the French music of this century than Bartók or Kodály, a musical language that was not customary in Middle-Europe.

> The influence of Magyar folk-music is less obvious in his works than in those of Bartók and Kodály, chiefly because Lajtha was attracted by other aspects of the traditional materials: it was their melodic shape and form, viewed primarily as an objective musical element regardless of their peculiarly national characteristics, that inspired him.[62]

In 1948 Lajtha gave a lecture in London on a topic entitled *Different approaches of Bartók, Kodály and [Lajtha] to folk-music*[63] in which he expressed his view of the fundamental difference between folk-music as a collective art and classical music as an individual art. In his opinion folk-music has a primarily social, ritual and

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[62] *New Grove*, "László Lajtha," 377.

[63] Berlász, ed., *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött Írásai*, 1:130.

mystical function while the goal of classical music is always related to aesthetics. Lajtha did not promote the performance of folk-music as did Bartók and Kodály by arranging many folk-tunes with the intention of performing them in public. He did not give opus numbers to his folk arrangements, with the exception of his *String Quartet* no. 10, op. 58 (Transylvanian Suite), composed in 1953. To perform folk-music in its pure form on the concert stage, said Lajtha in the same lecture, would necessarily result in the ethnographic essentials getting lost by the adoption of certain aesthetic principles otherwise foreign to folk-music.[64] The beauty of folk-music, its aesthetic value, continues Lajtha, is what Bartók and Kodály managed to implant in their music. Every folk-song arrangement, according to Lajtha, is worth as much as the composer is capable of contributing to the original song from his own invention. About his own relationship to the folk repertoire, Lajtha states that he was attracted to the folk-song because of its melody:

> . . . In the Conservatory I could study harmony, counterpoint, orchestration and everything except how to write a melody--how the melody is engendered. I did not want to imitate anyone. Similarly to my fellow students,[65] Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud, I wanted to get rid of Wagner, the heavy chromaticism as well as academicism. . . . I found the pure and instinctive song, the spontaneity of the melody in the folk songs. . . . In my music the elements of folklore appear as elements of *folklore imaginaire*, if this terminology exists at all. . . . I do not like folkloristic music. . . . The folk song cannot . . . replace a lack of talent and invention. It depends on the composer whether the folk song becomes a jewel or a cliché in the composition. . . .[66]

Lajtha's concept and use of folklore elements in his music "admitted a considerable stylistic freedom of treatment."[67] The Hungarian style in his works fitted equally with

[64] Ibid.,1:131.

[65] At this point Lajtha either refers to Honegger and Milhaud as his contemporaries or to his actual fellow students (this is the exact term he uses) during his years in Paris. Milhaud entered the Paris Conservatoire in1909 where Honegger was one of his classmates and friends.

[66] Berlász, ed., *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött Írásai*, 1:134.

[67] *New Grove*, "László Lajtha," 377.

the international influence that can be felt in his compositions, among them, the French stylistic features and the Baroque-inspired polyphonic texture.

Lajtha's viewpoint on contemporary music expressed in *Le public et la musique contemporaine*[68] is similarly instructive in terms of understanding his compositional ideals and intentions. He noted that the twentieth century was the century of musical innovators; however, he saw a paradox in that neither the current economic situation nor the public favoured innovation. The radical change in compositional technique was the cause, he believed, for the ruin of modern art which refused to use the results of the past and based its language exclusively on innovation. Lajtha was a representative of a school that tried to create a synthesis between old and new rather than forging ahead, whatever the cost. The unique nature of the French spirit with which he became acquainted in Paris can be found in the combination of audacious innovation and the respect for old forms.

In the same article Lajtha writes that new music went through a stylistic period in which composers devoted themselves to conventional and stylized compositional techniques in an excessive way, turning a blind eye to the human factor. The foundations and teachings of folklorism which is deeply rooted in human instincts created a reaction against it, according to Lajtha. He distances himself both from the conservativism of styles that constantly refers back to the past and from the innovative styles in which there is a wholesale embracing of revolutionary experiments.

Lajtha retained an integrity of his own creative workshop which reflects what he had to say in his writing about contemporary musical art. He did not take part in the work of any newly-organized institutions for modern music in Hungary. As a composer in Hungary, he detached himself from public life and remained extremely isolated. During his lifetime none of his compositions was recorded on discs, and there

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[68] Berlász, ed., *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött Írásai*, 1:255-259.

was only one concert, in Paris on May 25, 1955, that was devoted entirely to his music.[69]

Lajtha felt some very close ties with composers of the *École de Paris*, especially Henry Barraud, as is reflected in his letters to the French composer, compiled by Melinda Berlász.[70] His correspondance with Barraud contains some valuable information with regard to their professional relationship and to the common goals they tried to achieve through their compositions. This chapter about Lajtha's writings on musical styles and contemporary music cannot be complete without some passages quoted from that correspondence.

> There is nothing as difficult as simplicity itself: an easily understandable style, which is sophisticated, gracious, flexible, powerful and first of all: rich in invention and temperament, without which art cannot be called art.[71]

> I love melodic lines, the counterpoint, the colours, forms, but only when they are pure, transparent, without any false and untrue material.[72]

> This is truly noble material![73] A short piece without anything superficial, the melodic lines are beautiful, the rhythms are refined and all different . . . You can characterize similarly to a painter of portraits. Couperin was the great master of that. He knew more about it than Bach.[74]

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[69] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 194.

[70] Melinda Berlász, "Lajtha László 23 Levele Henry Barraudhoz," 13-42.

[71] Ibid., 21.

[72] Ibid., 22.

[73] Lajtha refers to Barraud's *tragédie lyrique*, *Numance*.

[74] Berlász, "Lajtha László 23 Levele Henry Barraudhoz," 22.

CHAPTER 7

STYLISTIC FEATURES IN LAJTHA'S VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL COMPOSITIONS

Lajtha's musical style is best characterized in terms of a consistently progressive attitude toward musical composition. Beside the influence of modern trends in his music, his style constantly refers back to the long tradition of European musical culture. Lajtha composed sixty-eight works in a great variety of genres, including compositions for solo intruments, choral and orchestral works, an opera and film scores. He composed ten string quartets, nine symphonies, more than twenty chamber works as well as eight choral works. Melinda Berlász's summary of Lajtha's *oeuvre* sheds light on the composer's devotion to particular musical genres during different periods of his lifetime.[75] Berlász points out that "these genre-centered periods do not represent his [Lajtha's] exclusive devotion to one single genre, though there is an example of that, but only some more definite interest in compositions of the same genre."[76] Browsing through the work list of Lajtha's compositions these periods can be summarized in the following way. In the 1920s his main interest lay in the genres of chamber music and string quartets. The 1930s were the years when he composed the first two of his nine symphonies, two *Divertimenti*, film and ballet music as well as his secular choral works. In the 1940s the choice of various genres shows more balance; however, in his late creative period he once again concentrates on three distinct genres: string quartets, symphonies and sacred choral works.

Lajtha's first influence was the dense musical language of the

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[75] Melinda Berlász, "Műfajszerű Gondolkodás Lajtha László Zeneszerzői Életművében I.," *Magyar Zene* 31 (1990): 99-107. "Műfajszerű Gondolkodás Lajtha László Zeneszerzői Életművében II.," *Magyar Zene* 31 (1990): 193-200.

[76] Berlász, "Műfajszerű Gondolkodás I," 100.

Expressionist composers, a style which is reflected in two compositions written in the 1910s and several other works written in the 1920s before the *Third String Quartet* (1929). That he considered these early efforts as belonging to a period of his life when he was seeking his own compositional language is reflected by the fact that later in the 1930s he considered only his *Motet*, op. 8 (1926), among his other early works written between 1921 and 1928, worth publishing. The rest of these other compositions remained in manuscript form or were lost. Mention of this period of his compositional style is especially important for my essay since the *Motet* was Lajtha's first vocal composition. Except for the *Three Nocturnes* op. 34, various folksong arrangements and the *Vocalise-Étude*, which was written as a vocal exercise and used as exam and competition material at the *Conservatoire* in Paris, Lajtha never again returned to the song genre.[77]

The musical style of the *Motet* recalls, if only to some extent, the style of Schoenberg, Berg, Stravinsky and Bartók in the 1910s, the period when, parallel with the Expressionist tendencies in fine arts and literature, the ruling compositional styles went through several changes as well. Composers sought to further intensify the emotional and subjective aspect of the musical expression of Romantic music. From the great variety of musical means used to achieve this, Lajtha incorporates the free atonal and polyphonic style of these composers in the *Motet* (see fig. 1). An otherwise diatonic theme with a tone-set of three notes is developed both in the vocal and instrumental lines with constantly changing tonal centres. The theme is heard starting at different pitches of the chromatic scale both as major and minor trichord. The musical development is driven by the somewhat canonic setting of this short melodic motive.

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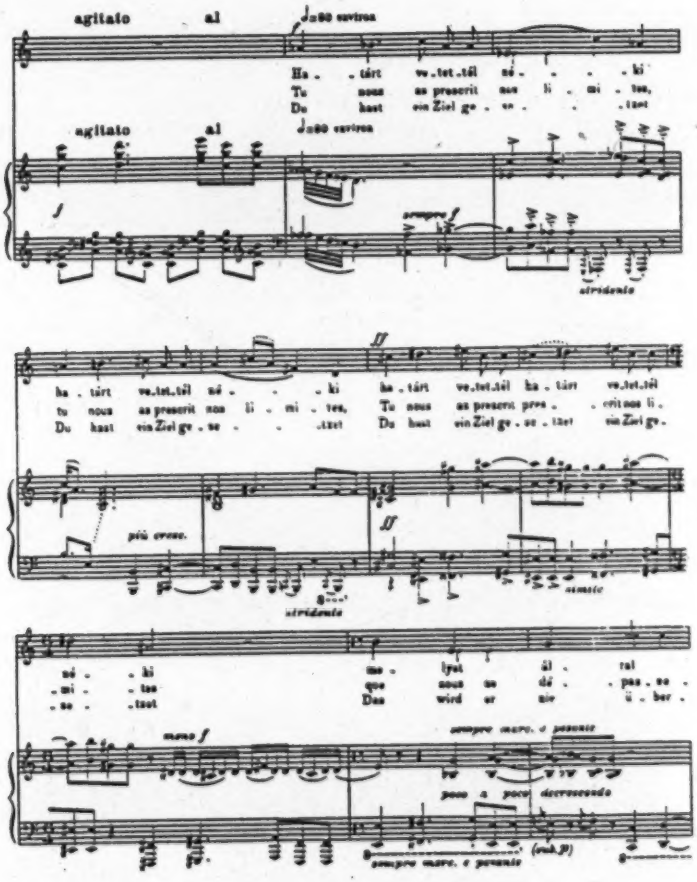
[77] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 110.

Figure 1.. *Motet*, op. 8, mm. 22-31.

It is a generally-accepted fact that Lajtha's mature musical style started to emerge in the 1930s. The following sections deal with the most important features of his music represented by his choral compositions.

Polyphony

An important stylistic element of Lajtha's compositional technique, both in his early and later periods, is the constant influence of the polyphony of pre-Classical masters, primarily the instrumental polyphony found in J.S. Bach's works. Lajtha confessed that he wrote modern fugues following in Bach's footsteps.[78] He occasionally enriched and embellished even his folk-song arrangements and folklore-inspired works with polyphonic ideas. He wrote polyphonic structures of vast dimensions in some of his early instrumental works such as the *Piano Quintet*, op.6 and the *Second String Quartet*, op.7.[79] Both these works remained in manuscript. His later style preserved the polyphonic thinking and the logistics of structure, similar to Bartók. The musical material of his choral works, on the other hand, is enriched by the counterpoint of early Renaissance masters, creating a break from the chordal fabric of Romantic music in order to lighten the textures.

The early music tradition and repertoire with which he became acquainted during his time at the *Schola Cantorum* had an important effect on Lajtha's compositional style. One significant innovation was his use of the compositions of pre-Classical masters such as Handel, Corelli and Telemann in his teaching at the National Conservatory. His interpretations of Baroque music resisted the taste for modernization, for when performing Bach's music he was very much in favour of using small ensembles, changing the bowing technique, and creating a logical and transparent phrasing.[80] The early vocal polyphony and the madrigal style were what most notably affected the structural and musical characteristics of his early choral works.

Lajtha's choral works show great variety in the use of imitation

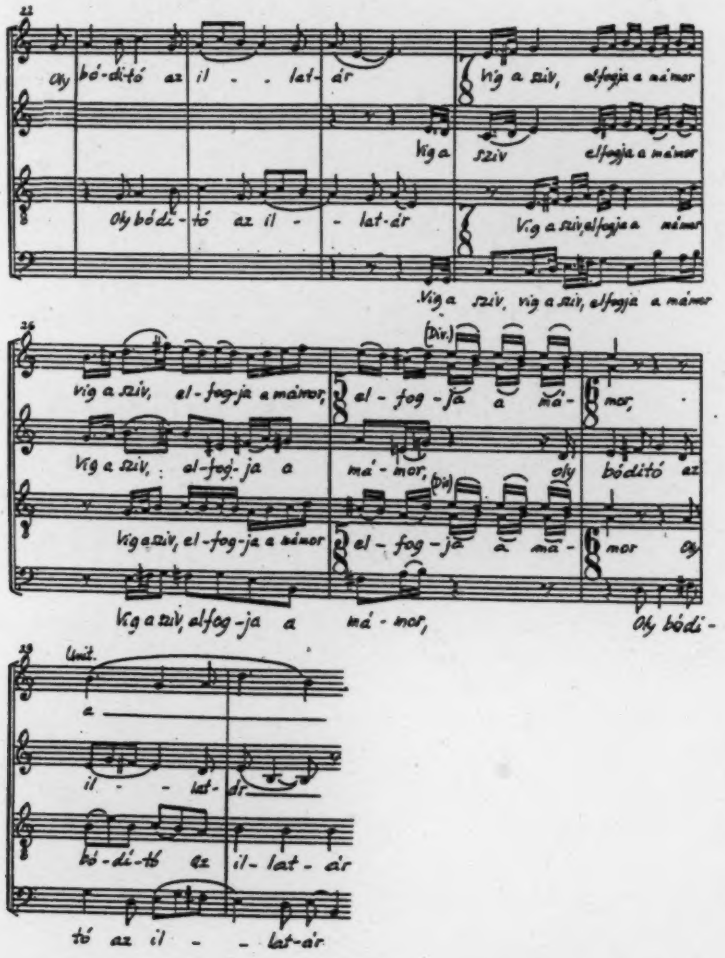
[78] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 97.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Breuer, "Lajtha László a "Régizenész"," 5.

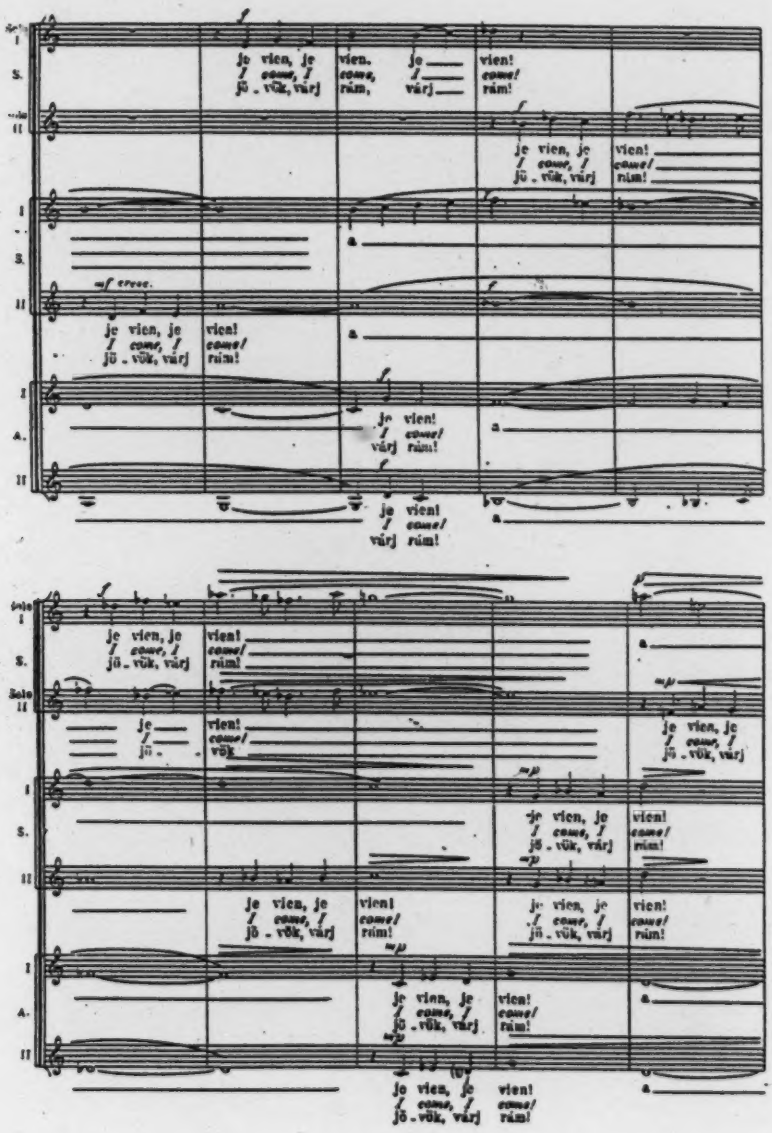
techniques. He does not write extended fugues although the use of imitation is one of the predominant characteristics in his choral works. In several places he interweaves the musical material of various sections with continuous imitation, creating motet-like connections. The type of imitation found in his vocal works ranges from simple canonic structures as found in the soprano and tenor parts and later the alto and bass parts of figure 2, to motet-like imitation as found in the treatment of the opening motif of the various parts in figure 3.

Figure 2. *Four Madrigals*, op.29, no.2, mm. 22-31.


Oly bó-di-tó az il - - lat-ár
Vig a szív, elfogja a mámor
Vig a szív elfogja a mámor
Oly bódi-tó az il - - lat-ár
Vig a szív elfogja a mámor
Vig a szív, vig a szív, elfogja a mámor
(Div.)
vig a szív, el-fog-ja a mámor,
el - fog - ja a má- mor,
Vig a szív, el-fog-ja a má - mor,
Oly bódító az
Vig a szív, el-fog-ja a mámor
el - fog - ja a má- mor Oly
Vig a szív, elfog-ja a má - mor,
Oly bódi-
Unis.
a
il - - lat- ár
bó-di-tó az il- lat - ár
tó az il - - lat-ár

The *Four Madrigals* of 1939 with their French texts recall the polyphony of the Renaissance in their similarity to the French Renaissance choral chansons.

Figure 3. *Chanson*, op.23, no.1, mm. 125-134.



The structure of *Chanson* (op. 23, no.1) recalls the polyphony of the late Gothic Flemish masters embedded in twentieth-century musical idioms. The style of this piece is manifested in the thick network of polyphonic progressions. The cold-sounding melodic lines are restlessly woven together in the polyphonic fabric. Lajtha recalls the linear art of early Flemish polyphony that differs from the later, more melodious Italian style. One might even sense some resistance in the way he discloses the more lyric melodic world, characteristic of Italian Renaissance style as opposed to Flemish music.

In several places he uses more subtle polyphonic development. For example, in the Benedictus movement of his *Missa in tono phrygio* op. 50 the *fugato* exposes the theme in tonal answer both in its original and mirror forms.

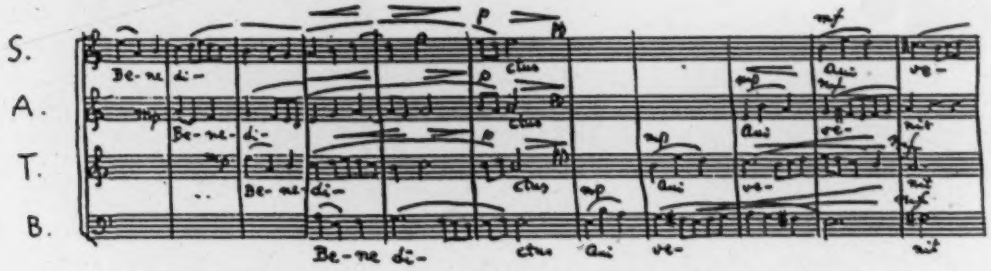
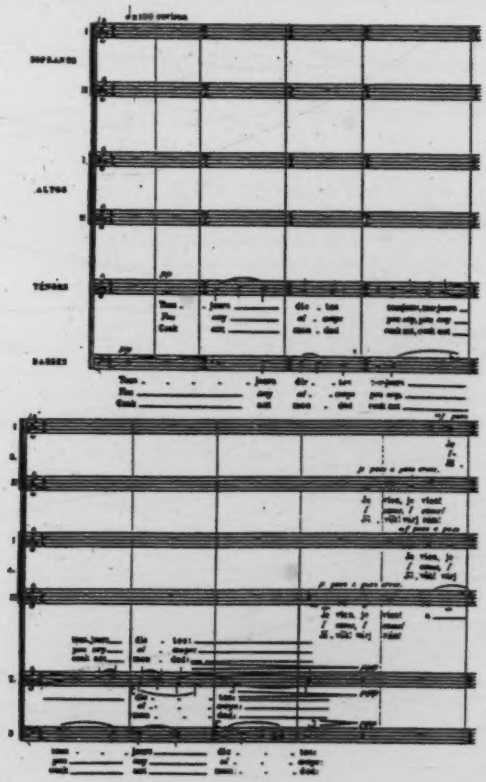
Figure 4. *Missa in tono phrygio*, op. 50, "Benedictus."

Occasionally his themes are followed by an answer or a series of answers, which, with regard to the structure of the melody-creating intervals, correspond to the theme, while at the same time transforming the intervals themselves, for example from a minor third to a major third. In this way the theme appears in altered aural guises, creating new modes in the progression (see fig. 5).

Figure 5. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.3, mm. 95-100.

The length of the motifs used in the imitative passages also varies. Lajtha can masterfully build up long progressions out of "micro" melodies. Similar to the Renaissance motet style, where different texts receive different musical material, the themes used in imitation often create divisions within the form in Lajtha's choral works. The *Chanson*, op. 23, no. 1 clearly illustrates this technique of polyphonic writing. Most of the phrases of the poem are developed polyphonically. The motifs used in the imitation vary according to the text, with each thought of the poem receiving different melodic material. The structure is tightly held together with a refrain-like appearance of the imitation on the words "je viens." (For elaboration of the theme see fig. 3) The four-note "micro" melody is elaborated in the female voices in various forms, creating a dialogue with the male parts that constantly sing about vain hope in love (see fig. 6).

Figure 6. *Chanson*, op.23, no.1, mm. 1-10.



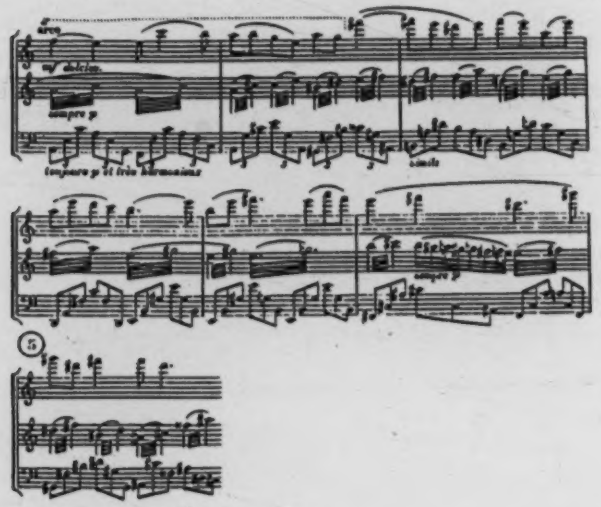
Recurring motifs in constantly-varied form, similar to that illustrated above, can be found in other choral works. These "refrain" themes significantly contribute to the cohesion within the works.

The polyphonic treatment of material is very common in Lajtha's instrumental works as well. M. Hettich, the renowned French musicologist, expressed his appreciation of Lajtha's works, and considered him a worthy follower of César Franck's neglected great polyphonic style.[81] Indeed, Lajtha considered the music of César Franck, the former organist of *Sainte-Clotilde*, the most excellent representative of Bach's legacy. Franck's chromatic harmonic language as well as his *cantabile* melodies also affected Lajtha's more stentorian, harsher tone which characterizes some of his instrumental works.

Harmonic language

The richness of Lajtha's polyphonic fantasy is very often embedded in a wide harmonic layer in his music. A harmonic accompaniment supporting a theme previously set polyphonically can be observed in the second movement of the *String Trio* op. 41. Lajtha opens the movement with a slow melody developed like a fugue which is later interrupted by a *parlando* middle section. To conclude the movement, the violin, and later the viola, present the opening theme in a free harmonic and polyphonic development:

[81] László Fábián, 349.

Figure 7. *Third String Trio*, op.41, second movement, mm. 44-50.

Otto Gombosi's essay, dating from 1929, shows that writer's predilection for investigating how Lajtha reconciled the opposition of polyphonic and harmonic elements in his early works of the 1920s. Gombosi pointed out that Lajtha's interest in polyphony did not exclude the lively exploration of new harmonic resources. In his analysis of Lajtha's *Piano Quartet* Gombosi claims that "Lajtha uses harmonies of Impressionistic colours, such as chords of the ninth and of the eleventh in order to raise the polyphonic material into sound symbols."[82] Gombosi compares Lajtha's compositional method to that of César Franck by saying that, similar to Franck, Lajtha simultaneously deals with harmonic and contrapuntal ideas and their individual assertion for independence.[83]

When these composers write polyphonic material they try to set their melodies free from harmonic connotations at a certain degree. In his choral works

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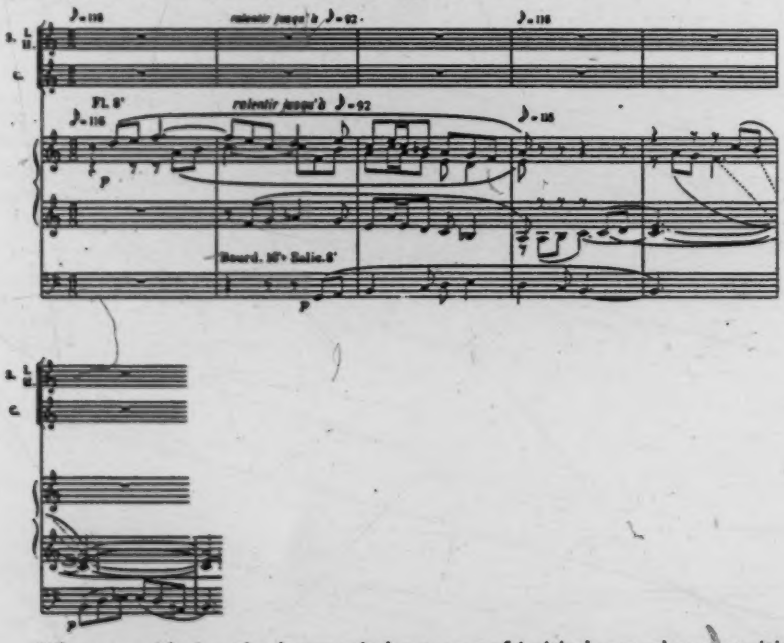
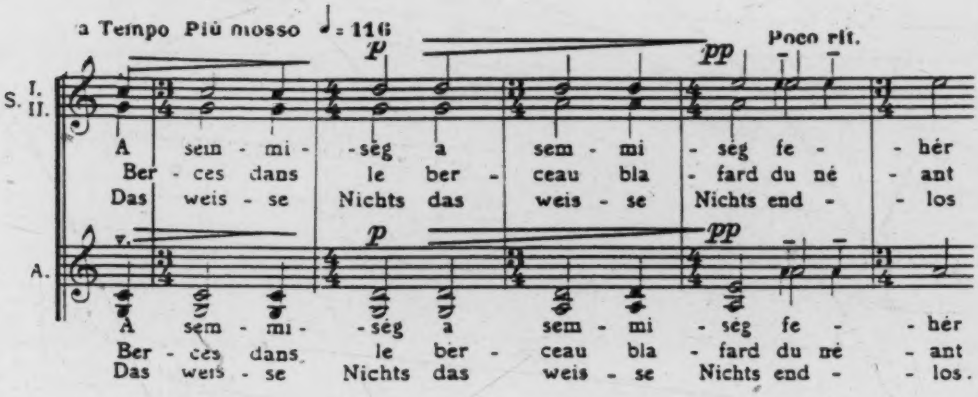
[82] Gombosi, 233. See translation from English into Hungarian in *Magyar Zene* 33 (1992): 192.

[83] Ibid.

Lajtha occasionally goes so far as to treat the voices in a strictly linear way, a technique that spontaneously creates colourful harmonies. This polyphonic writing bears close resemblance to the technique of the early Gothic masters, who often juxtaposed linear features without considering their vertical relations. This happens in the imitation shown in figure 3. The result is an atmosphere created by harmonic colours that are of primary importance in a musical progression, but one ruled by the predominance of melody over harmony. The polyphonic vocal texture in Lajtha's creations usually rejects the logistics of any bass progression in the Classical sense, nor does it adhere to a Classical severity of form. Lajtha's imitative ideas coincide with modern sound ideas. Figure 8 shows how diatonic motifs in the imitation can be embedded within a modern sounding polyphonic-harmonic context:

Figure 8. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.2, mm. 1-7.

When considering the harmonic language of Lajtha's vocal compositions independently from polyphony, one can discover a great variety of musical influences. The choral works demonstrate this multi-coloured nature of his harmonic ideas. A

selection of passages from various choral works is shown below in order to illustrate the variety of harmonic material used by Lajtha in his vocal works. The archaic *organum* style of chord progression is shown in figure 9.

Figure 9. *Esti párbeszéd*, op.16, no.1, mm. 72-76.

a Tempo Più mosso ♩= 116
Poco rit.
S. I. II.
A. V.
A sem - mi - ség a sem - mi - ség fe - hér
Ber - ces dans le ber - ceau bla - fard du né - ant
Das weis - se Nichts das weis - se Nichts end - los.

Both pieces in op. 16 are written on poems of the Hungarian Lajos Aprily.

The Credo movement of his *Missa in tono phrygio* op. 50 (still in manuscript form)[84] also shows the composer's use of *organum*, parallel fourth and fifths, employed to lend power and strong definition to his subjects. Lajtha's intention of powerful expression is also shown by his use of *fortissimo* and *pesante* markings in the string parts in this movement.

The next example reflects the way in which Lajtha occasionally recalls the vertical sound of Renaissance partsongs by simplifying chord progressions as much as using exclusively triads in root position:

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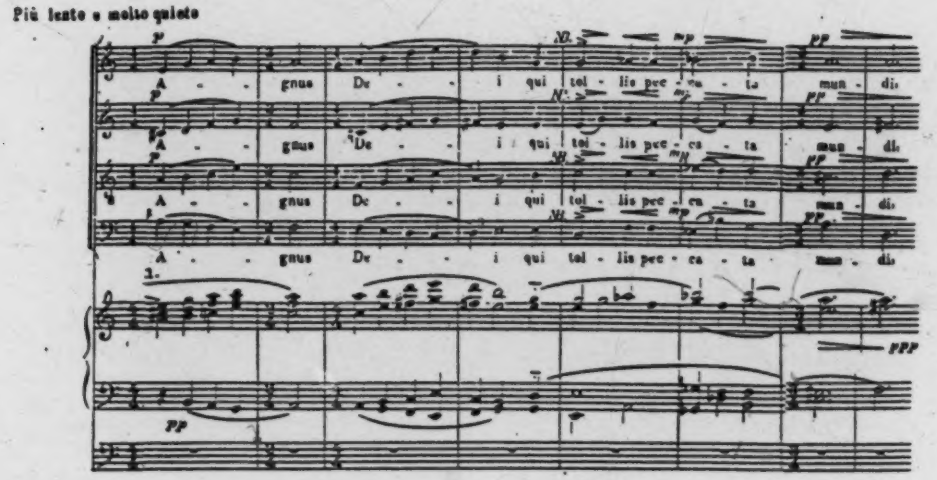
[84] The author wishes to express his gratitude to Ildikó Lajtha, who provided the score for study purposes.

Figure 10. *Missa pro choro mixto et organo*, op. 54, "Agnus Dei," mm. 55-62.

Più lento e molto quieto
A - gnus Dei qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di
A - gnus Dei qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di
A - gnus Dei qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di
A - gnus Dei qui tol - lis pec - ca - ta mun - di
1.
PP
PPP

The combination of a similar Renaissance-like progression of diatonic chords with some Romantic harmonic traits is shown in figure 11. The Renaissance progression is represented by the succession of diatonic vertical allignments that are coloured by the typically Romantic tritone relation between the B-flat Major and E Major triads.

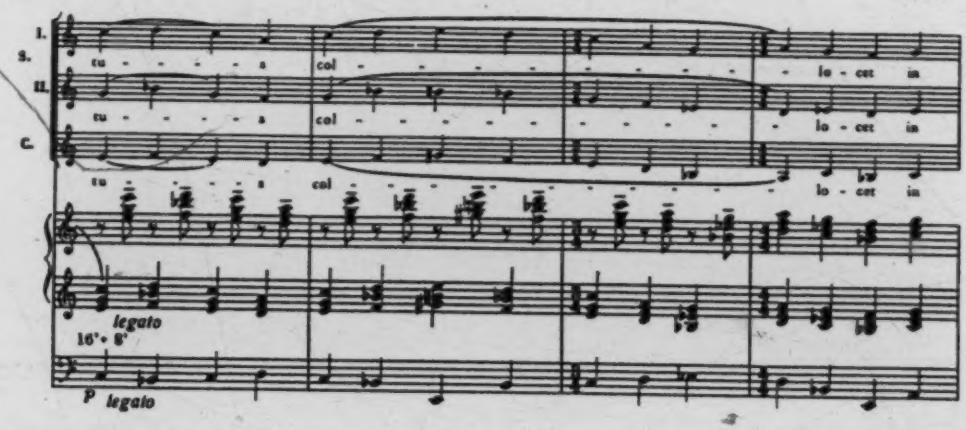
Figure 11. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.1, mm. 50-53.

Lajtha is fond of chords used in third relations, a strong Romantic feature in his choral and intrumental compositions. In the next progression, shown in figure 12, Lajtha connects musical phrases by harmonic relations of a third. The first phrase starts on a B-flat Major triad that is followed by a phrase starting on a D-Major triad in measure 3, in turn followed by G-flat Major in measure 5 and E-flat Major in measure 7.

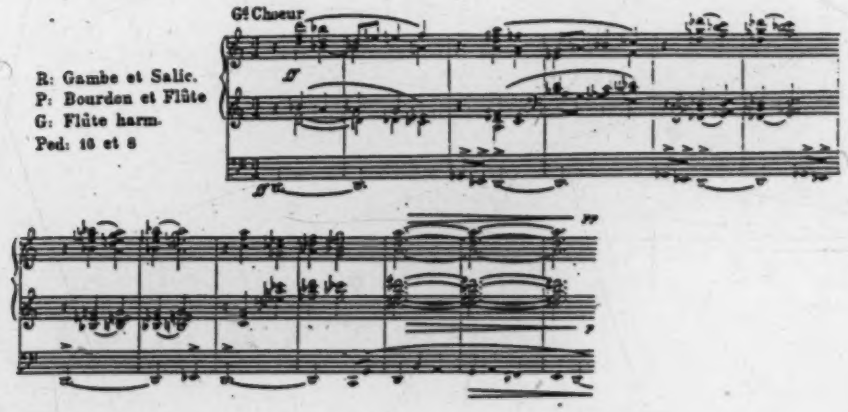
Figure 12. *Missa pro choro mixto et organo*, op. 54, "Gloria," mm. 1-13.

A chromatic language similar to that of Liszt's, Wagner's or Franck's can be found in the way Lajtha suspends diatonic chords using chromatic changing chords. These are shown in figure 13.

Figure 13. a. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.2, mm. 46-49.

(The tones of the two D Major triads in mm. 48 and 49 are connected by chromatic changing notes.)

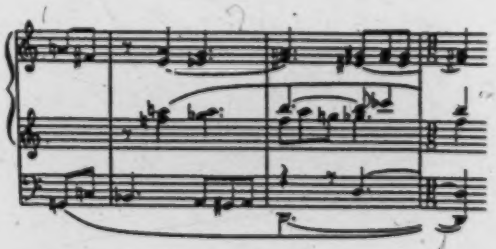



Figure 13. b. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.2, mm. 104-106.

(An A-sharp minor chord resolving to B Major through a chromatic changing chord in m. 104.)

Figure 13. c. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.2, mm. 67-70.

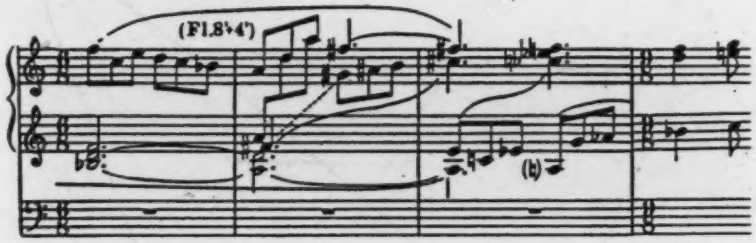
(A D-Major chord resolving to the third-related B-flat Major chord through a chromatic changing chord in m. 69.)

A selection of Impressionistic harmonic progressions of triads can be seen in figures 14 and 15. Lajtha's use of chords shifted in parallel movement occurs frequently in his choral works. Lajtha often composes entire passages of single-chord structures, multiplying the chosen chords in use on successive tones.

Figure 14. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.3, mm. 41-43.

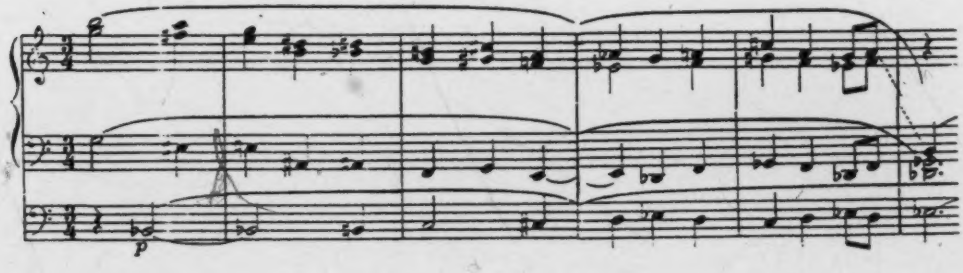
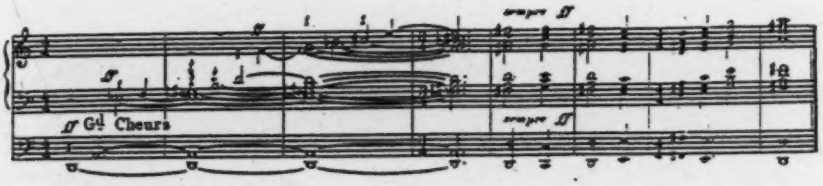



Figure 15. *Missa in tono phrygio*, op. 50, "Crucifixus," mm. 110-113.

At certain places Lajtha proves to be quite progressive by using cluster technique, the purpose of which is to create harmonic contrast and intensification. In most cases, as with the following example, the harmonic tension is resolved in clear consonance.

Figure 16. *Missa pro choro mixto et organo*, op. 54, "Credo," mm. 152-159.



The harmonic aspects found in his choral style can also be observed in his instrumental compositions. John S. Weissmann, the writer of a significant essay on Lajtha's symphonies, shows how Lajtha occasionally simplifies his harmonic vocabulary to archaic-sounding chord progressions, as in the last movement of his *Seventh Symphony*.[85] László Fábián, in his essay on Lajtha's music, turns his reader's attention to the use of modulations or polytonality in Lajtha's works that, according to him, does not advance much beyond the sometimes bold harmonic vocabulary of Liszt and Debussy.[86] The examples above lend credence to this statement. In fact, in his homophonic structures Lajtha strongly emphasises the functional role of harmonies in his compositions. When harmony takes priority over polyphony in his vocal works, he

[85] John S. Weissmann, "Lajtha László: a Szimfóniák," *Magyar Zene* 33 (1992): 207.

[86] László Fábián, 348.

holds together musical units by defined tonal centres outlined by the bass progression in the traditional Classical cadences. These cadential bass progressions can be found even in sections where the harmonic progression is otherwise developed more in the Impressionistic style or within a modal melodic-harmonic context. In the next example (see fig. 17) from *Canticum de Magna Hungariae Regina* (*Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge* op. 65, no. 3) both phrases close with the traditional V-I step in the bass; however, the dominant chords are not the traditional dominant-seventh chords, but in both cases are half-diminished seventh and ninth chords (D-F-A-flat-C-E-flat chord resolving to G Major in the first case; G-B-flat-D-flat-F resolving to C Major in the next one). These cadences can be interpreted as V-I cadences in the phrygian mode (ti-re-fa-la-do chord resolving to mi-si-ti chord). Similar examples can be found in abundance in *Missa in tono phrygio* op. 50.

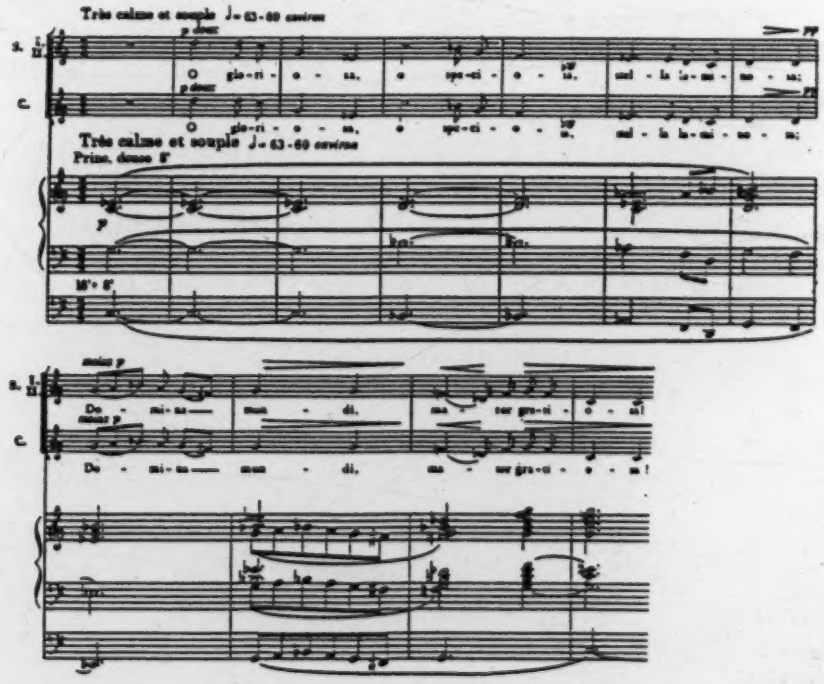
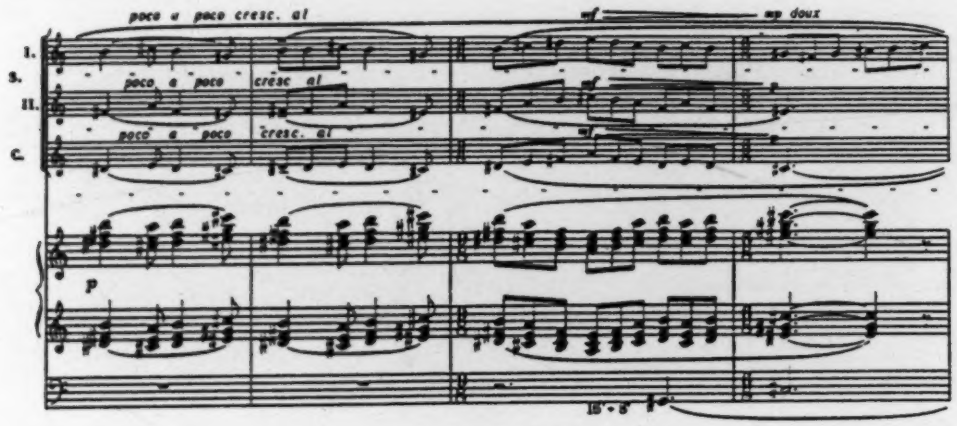
Figure 17. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no. 3, mm. 1-11.

The following example shows the V-I bass progression placed within an Impressionistic harmonic context.

Figure 18. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no. 2, mm. 94-97.

Melodic features

The most persuasive personal element of Lajtha's music is his melodic idiom. He shows a predilection for the lyric expansiveness of Romantic melodies; however, he ranges far afield for melodic models, from Gregorian chant to Baroque-like melodic lines. Folk melodies also significantly influence his melodic invention. His melodies combine the "French clarity, Italian abundance of invention, the melodic shape and structural articulation of Hungarian folk-music."[87] His highly inventive melodic materials often contain quasi-Hungarian tunes and phrases; for example, the themes of his *Fifth Symphony*, as shown by László Fábián, are drawn from Transylvanian lament songs.[88] Occasionally he writes chorale-like tunes, as in the next example:

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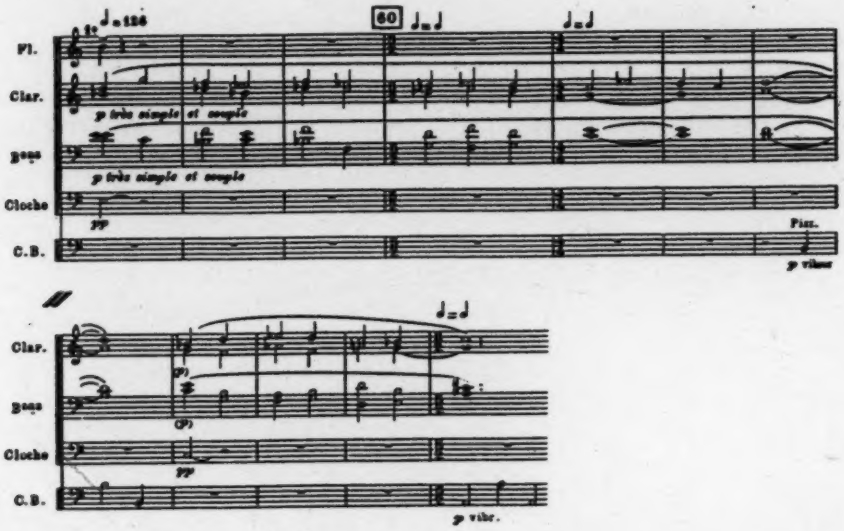
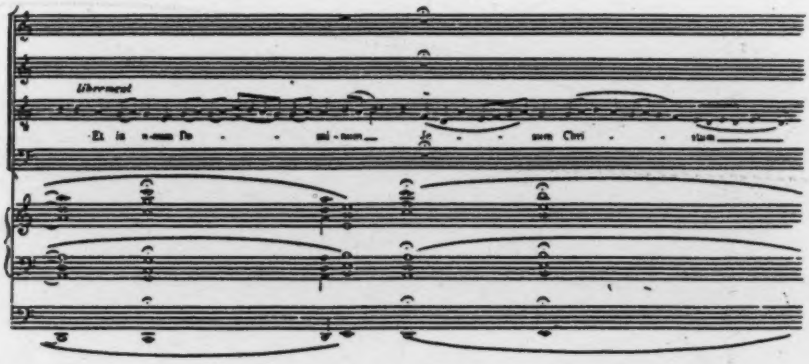
[87] John S. Weissmann, "Guide to Contemporary Hungarian Composers," *Tempo* 45 (1957): 27.

[88] László Fábián, 373.

Figure 19. *Symphony No.7*, Finale, mm. 57-68.

This feature of his music could be an influence from César Franck's chorale melodies. (Further stylistic relationship of Lajtha's music with César Franck's style is discussed later in this chapter.)

In passages of the "Credo" movement of Lajtha's *Missa pro choro mixto et organo* op. 54, the vocal-instrumental texture is reduced to chanting accompanied by long-held chords in the organ part.

Figure 20. *Missa pro choro mixto et organo*, op. 54, "Credo," m. 15.



Chant-like melodies are present in the Kyrie, Credo (Crucifixus) and Agnus Dei movements in *Missa in tono phrygio* op. 50. This stylistic element can be found in the *Magnificat* as well, where Lajtha adapts original canticle tones.

As a sign of his devotion to early music, Gregorian chant-like themes appear not only in his vocal works but in his orchestral pieces as well. Not only are these melodies strongly influenced by Gregorian chant but they also reveal a connection to those folk tunes that feature the opening motif (*initium*), the closing motif (*terminatio*) and the reciting-tone of the reciting psalms. This melodic feature in his compositions stems from these two roots. Melodies similar to those reciting tones are introduced as themes in his *Fifth Symphony*[89] and the *Seventh String Quartet*. An extraordinary combination of chant-like tune and folk-like melody serves as an important theme in his *Ninth Symphony*. Weissmann notes that Lajtha, in the melody played on a solo viola in the middle of the first movement, "manages to unite the pagan spirit with the Christian soul."[90]

Some of Lajtha's themes bear close resemblance to César Franck's long-arched hymn-like themes. In some of his works he develops his melodies through a series of inner expansions by the use of common idioms such as chromatic embellishments and metric and intervallic contrast:

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[89] For evidence of this see Weissmann's analysis of the symphonies, p. 204.

[90] Weissmann, "Lajtha László: a Szimfóniák," 210.

Figure 21. *Hegylakók*, op.16, no.2, mm. 49-62.

By abandoning symmetry through the endless melodic flow and absence of repetition, Lajtha aims to achieve a vibrant, taut melody that captivates the listener primarily by its simplicity (see fig. 21).

As a contrast, figure 22 shows a short pentatonic motif that is developed through imitation.

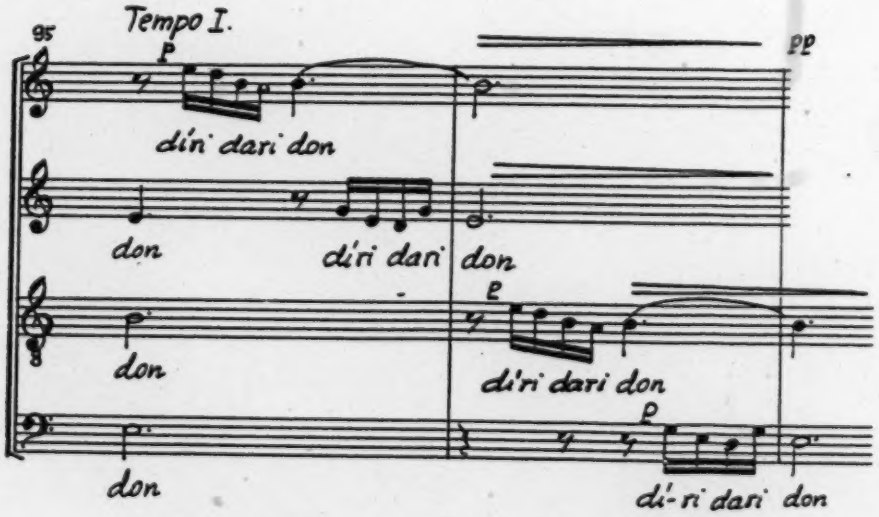
Figure 22. *Four Madrigals*, op. 29, no.2, mm. 95-97.

Lajtha's bent for writing melodies without chromatic notes is a characteristic in his vocal works, as seen in this extract from his *Mass* op. 54:

Figure 23. *Missa pro choro mixto et organo*, op. 54, "Agnus Dei," mm. 71-80.

The influence of church modes on Lajtha's compositions can best be illustrated with the movements of his *Missa in tono phrygio* op. 50. The movements are connected by the common use of the phrygian mode. Lajtha holds together the various movements by means commonly used in Renaissance writing. Each movement, with the exception of the Sanctus, starts on E and ends on E. One might speculate that he selected this mode characterized by a semitone between the first and second degrees of the scale, to reflect the subtitle of the work "*in diebus tribulationis,*" "in the days of troubles."

An ionian melody is shown in the following figure:

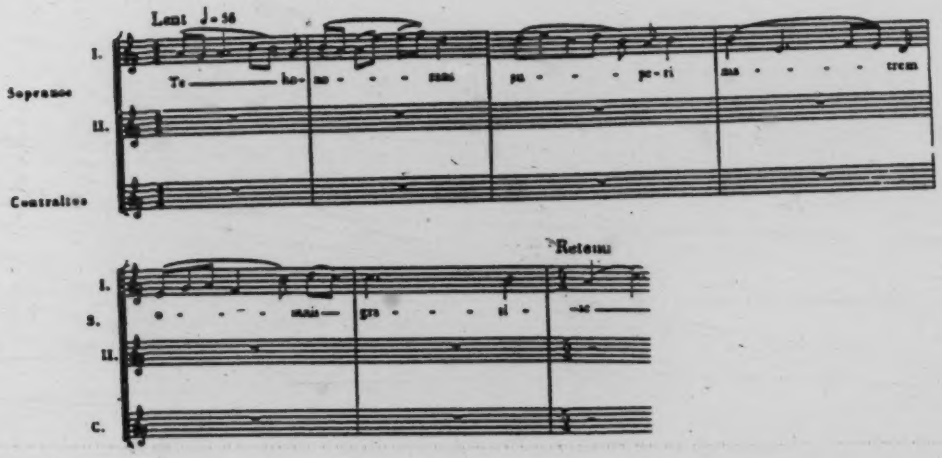
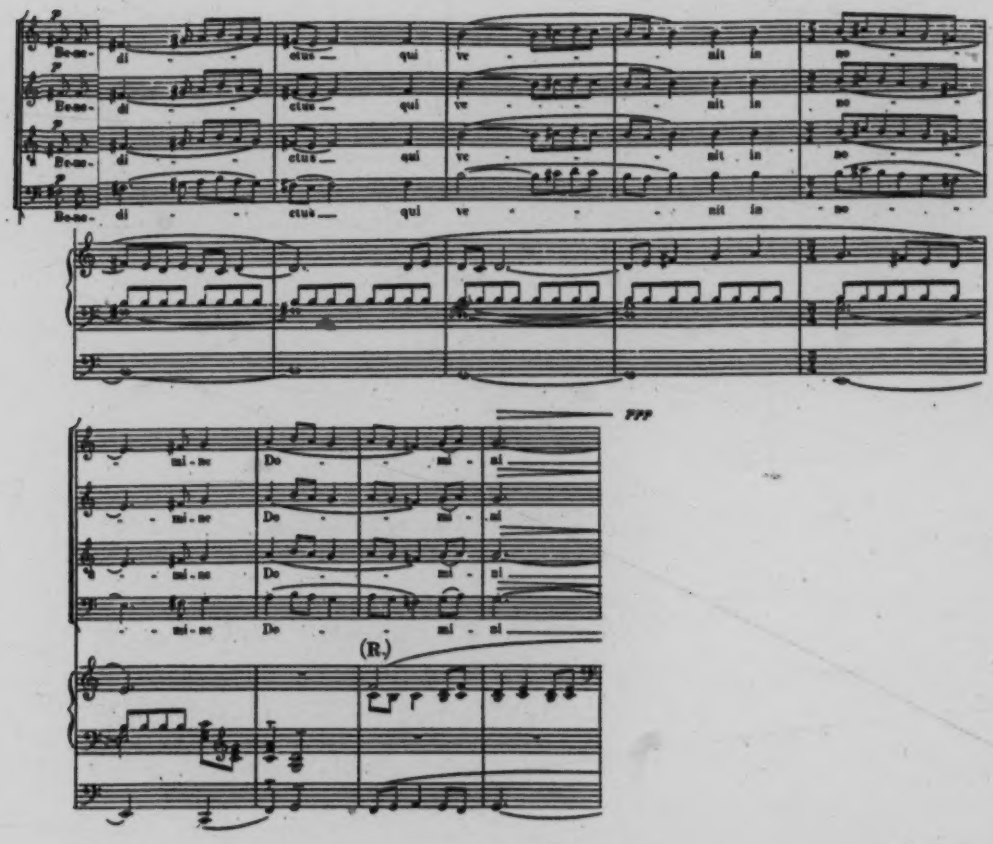
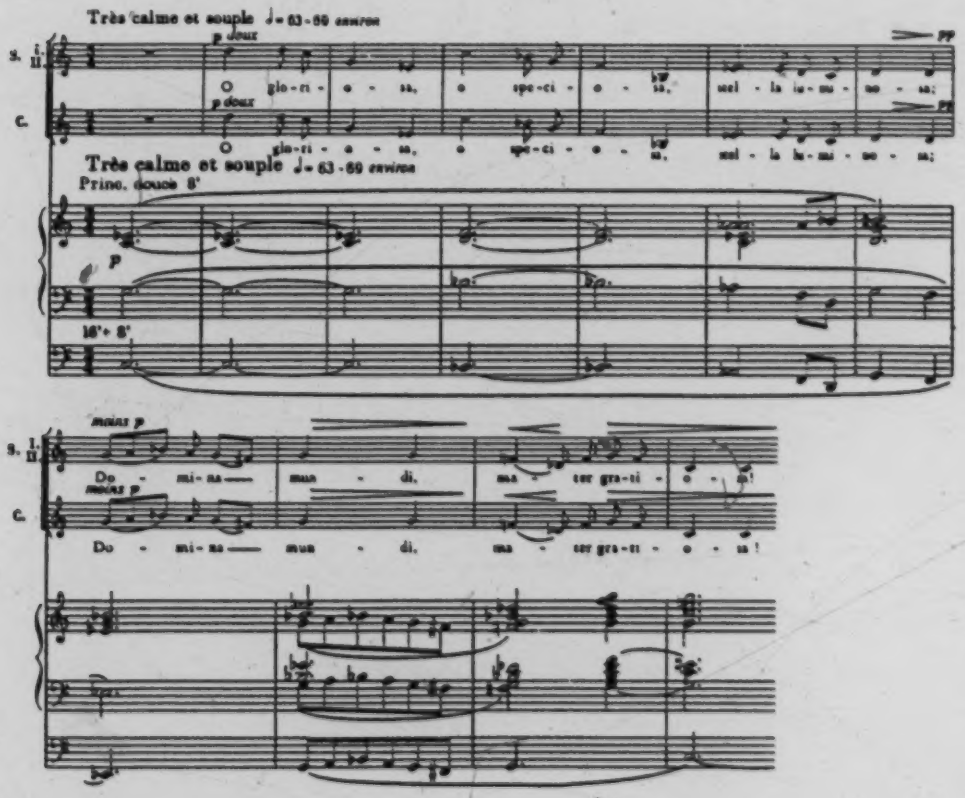
Figure 24. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.1, mm. 1-9.

The next example shows the way in which Lajtha changes the mode within a single melody. The melody starts with a motif sounding like B-hypodorian; however, the cadence has a strong mixolydian sound. Starting from the change of G-sharp to G-natural and later the F-sharp to F-natural, the listener hears modulation to other modes.

Figure 25. *Missa pro choro mixto et organo*, op. 54, "Sanctus-Benedictus," mm. 83-92.

The combination of various sets of tones can also be observed in other melodies. The application of the heptatonic modes, a pentatonic motif and a harmonic minor cell creates a typical "Lajtha-melody," as shown in the next example. The tune

shows how Lajtha manages to combine various melodic styles in a most natural-sounding arrangement. The opening of the tune is a simple Hungarian-sounding pentatonic phrase suggesting to the listener a folk-inspired melody. The phrygian cadence and the harmonic G-minor phrase that follows, however, tenderly changes the colour of the tune. The contrasting melodic colours of a folk-like phrase, the Classical and modal cells are sensitively combined in his diatonic vocabulary. Lajtha combines these musical motives in a simple progression.

Figure 26. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.3, mm. 1-11.

Lajtha frequently expands the boundaries of tonality in his melodies. He does it most frequently within a diatonic setting by changing the melodic colours

within a tune. Another tonally-ambiguous melody is heard in the same movement of the *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge* (see fig. 27). The middle of the melody is in harmonic F minor that is twice coloured by phrygian motifs in measures 51 to 52 and 55 to 56. The opening two measures with D naturals do not prepare the listener for the minor conclusion of the first phrase; the F minor tonality of the second phrase is itself coloured by phrygian motifs. The tune once again reflects many colours.

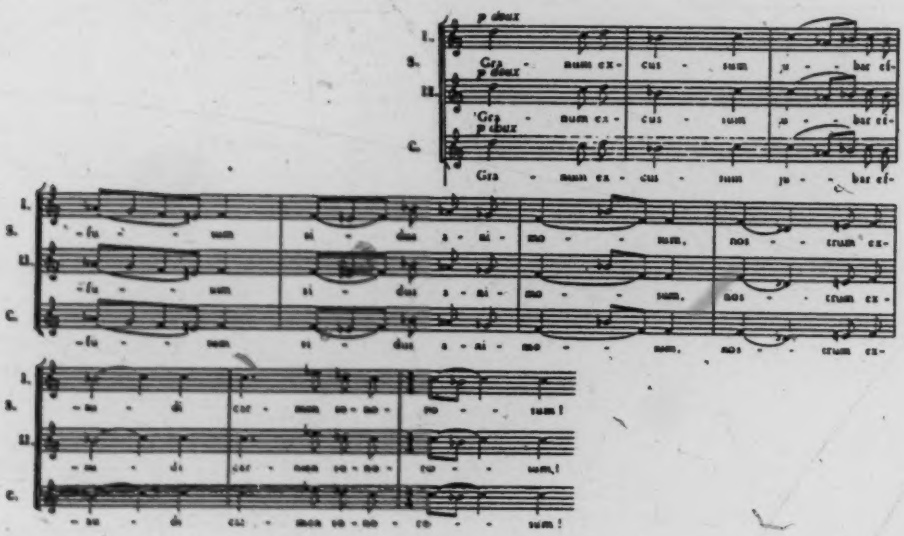
Figure 27. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.3, mm. 47-56.

The next example shows how Lajtha is further able to expand the boundaries of tonality by constantly changing the key centres within the melody. The chromatic descent at the end leads the tune into the atonal sphere.

Figure 28. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.1, mm. 27-40.

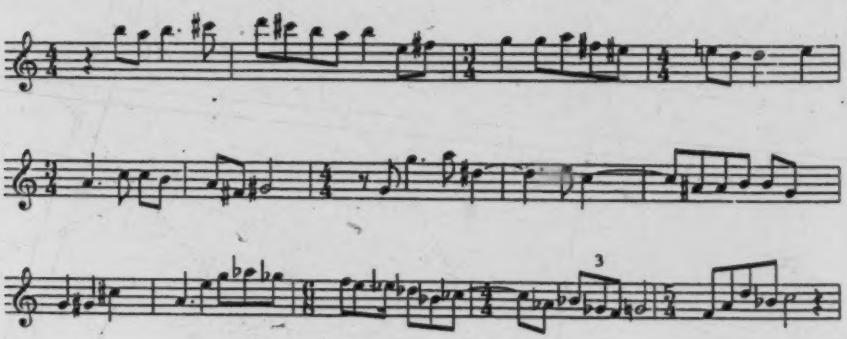
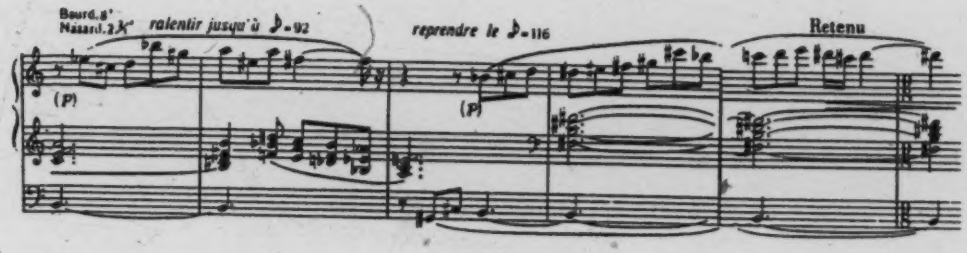


Figure 29 shows a truly atonal melody:

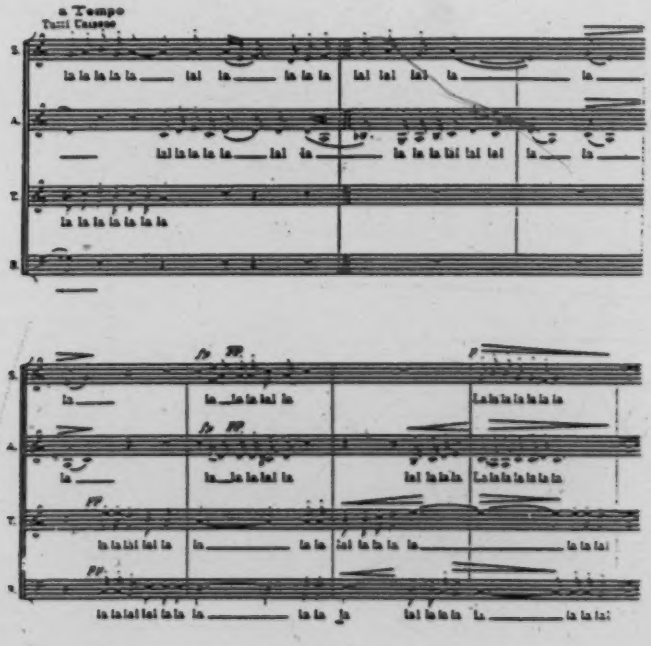
Figure 29. *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge*, op. 65, no.2, mm. 6-11.

Rhythmic features

Very much in keeping with that of Bartók, Lajtha's characteristic rhythm is always evident in his *allegros* and is unfailingly effective. A vivid *allegro* in the Gloria movement of his *Missa in tono phrygio* recalls the rhythmic intensity of his fast orchestral movements. The fast movements of his compositions are often characterized by motoric and intensely-driving rhythmic flow. Ceaseless rush, rapid pulsation--indeed virtual dancing--characterize his fast movements. The accented type of folk

rhythm appears in his dance-like movements.

Featured in Lajtha's music is the general tendency in contemporary music to move away from conventional symmetry and explore the possibilities of nonsymmetrical patterns. The asymmetric divisions and compound meters of his rhythmic ideas are occasionally intensified by percussive effects. His rhythmic invention is always flowing and continuous, even when it is founded upon more complicated cells. Wherever the insistent rhythmic flow becomes more placid, he allows his melodic invention to bloom more freely and richly.

The rhythmic activity found in his *allegro*-type instrumental music is present only to a lesser extent in his choral works. The lively *Rondel* based on Charles d'Orléans's poem is probably Lajtha's most rhythmically exciting choral work, exhibiting compound meters and asymmetric divisions in a continuously-driving movement:

Figure 30. *Rondel*, op.23, no.2, mm. 10-19.

The colours and the atmosphere of the Renaissance madrigals are brought to light in *Rondel*. As an option, the work can be performed with instrumental accompaniment. To some extent, this rhythmic vitality dominates the last of his *Quatre Madrigaux*.

The slow movements of his choral works are full of freely-flowing, *rubato*-type, sophisticated rhythmic progressions neglecting strong and predictable accents, thus creating a sensitive rhythmic flow in his works. This characteristic of his style is further discussed in the analysis of the *Magnificat*.

French and Hungarian music

Lajtha's frequent visits to Paris and his personal musical connections with French composers were important factors in the development of his own compositional style. "My case is really strange," Lajtha wrote. He found, as he writes, that in Hungary people considered his music strongly French in character. However, in France they found his music especially inspired by Hungarian folklore, even when he could prove that there was not any folk element in the music at all.[91] In an interview with Claude Champhray for Beaux-Arts,[92] Lajtha expressed the view that the Parisian school of composition was not restricted to French musicians but had become common currency throughout Europe.[93] Lajtha characterized this style as possessing tendencies such as a balanced sense of beautiful, always convincing, nevertheless occasionally surprising sonority. According to his viewpoint this school is marked by its rich community of individuals independent from each other.

An important French influence on Lajtha's choral works with organ

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[91] Berlász, ed., *Lajtha László Összegyűjtött írásai*, 1:14.

[92] This article is cited in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* as: C. Chamfray, "Lajtha," *Beaux Arts* (May 1936).

[93] The article is summarized by Breuer in *Fejezetek*, 112.

accompaniment is César Franck's organ style. Lajtha's technique of using various organ registrations in a very sensitive way shows inspiration received from Franck's music. More specific similarities in terms of the use of organ registers are to be considered in the analysis of the *Magnificat*. For almost his entire life Franck was a church organist (*Sainte-Clotilde*, Paris 1857-1890); however, the majority of his great organ compositions were written for situations independent of the Catholic church services. Although Franck was not a great researcher, the unification of different styles into one universal compositional language is certainly one of the main characteristics of his music. This is also a common element in Franck's and Lajtha's compositional style. As Antal Molnár comments, "he [Franck] brought his obsessive modulations and turgidity into the most conservative classical forms such as sonata, quartet and symphony."[94] Molnár suggests that Franck's instrumental, chamber and orchestral music shows the effect of the changing organ registration similar to Bruckner's compositions.[95] Franck's musical style shows the mixture of the music of Bach, Liszt and Wagner, and in this sense he might be described as engendering a new compositional school. Like Liszt, Franck was Romantically fascinated by plainchant. "He . . . published a volume of accompaniments and 'vocal arrangements' of 'Gregorian Service' (*cultes grégoriennes*) which, one hopes, are by now used only documentarily."[96] Even on his deathbed he worked on a fantasy for organ based on a Gregorian chorale.[97] The fascination with plainchant is another common feature in Franck's and Lajtha's music.

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[94] Hutchings, 91-92.

[95] Antal Molnár, *Romantikus Zeneszerzők* (Budapest: Magvető könyvkiadó, 1980), 156.

[96] Hutchings, 92.

[97] Molnár, 161.

Formal elements and orchestration

Lajtha attempted to combine his musical thoughts into well-arranged, perfect-looking units without being restricted to the conventions of Classical sonata form. His formal ideas are similar to those of the new French music in that they go beyond the Classical dramatic approach to a form that bore close resemblance to a dramatic series of acts. "His polyphonic imagination and Latin sympathies make him avoid the essentially German sonata principle and resort to the basically Latin schemes of "*strophe et refrain*," *rondo* and *dacapo* forms which he applies in a genuinely original and spontaneous manner."[98] His music is very often composed on the basis of the variation technique where the principle of variation goes far beyond the simple elaboration of the inner richness of the theme itself (Classical music) and rather tends to highlight and enlighten themes in various musical surroundings.[99] His approach to musical form shows less concentration on the logical and dramatic chains in the musical development. The flow of his thematic invention often consists of fairly long themes that can later be recalled in a different context during the course of the movement. The lack of contrast between the themes within a movement or even within a multi-movement composition is not unusual (e.g.*Spring Symphony*). The individual themes develop freely and widely into large units, a technique called by the French *l'épanouissement des thèmes.*[100] Lajtha moved away from the heritage of classical architecture, seeking plastic forms that would capture something of that fluidity.[101]

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[98] Weissmann, "Guide to Contemporary Hungarian Composers," 28.

[99] This feature of his compositional style could as well be part of Franck's influence on his music. Examples by Franck include *Trois Chorals* as well as *Grand pièce symphonique* for organ to name but a few.

[100] László Fábián, 350.

[101] In a letter to Henry Barraud he writes the following: ". . . I am captivated by the forms used in Renaissance music in which the themes create a solid structure such as a Gothic or Roman vaulting." Berlász, "Lajtha László 23 levele Henry Barraudhoz," 39.

While his chamber music written in the 1920s and the 1930s sounded more avant-garde, exemplified by the use of the dense musical language of the Expressionist composers, his symphonic works dating from the 1940s and 1950s shun the then-current trends of Western music--the post-Webernesque school, the dominant experimentalism, and electronic music. All his life he sought his own style, constantly perfecting his technique. That Lajtha was a virtuoso of orchestration is evident in his symphonies. He displays a fascinating wealth of orchestral coloration and differentiation. His orchestration technique was greatly influenced by French symphonic music of the century. Lajtha uses the instruments, especially the winds, individually, very often exploiting them soloistically; thus we find the *Third Symphony* starting with a long solo for the clarinet. The French composers regarded the orchestral instruments as living and sensitive sound sources and used them accordingly, so that the individual timbres stand out with delicate clarity. He creates tension between different vocal timbres by varying the texture in his choral works, e.g. often alternating the male and female timbres in his works written for mixed chorus.

According to János Breuer, the sensuality that makes French music from Jannequin through Couperin, Rameau and Berlioz to Debussy and Ravel so different from the German musical tradition, also characterizes Lajtha's music.[102] Indeed Lajtha's music has a Frenchness in its demand for subtle sonority. His Impressionistic harmonies create a special atmosphere offering a subtle, resourceful and singular blending of the French style and his own creative ideas. As a Hungarian, it was natural for Lajtha to be influenced by Hungarian folk music, but instead of perpetuating that tradition he became a significant composer of music showing other cultural influences. One of the most important aspects of his work is his creation of an individual modern style based on the vast European tradition.

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[102] Breuer, *Fejezetek*,139.

CHAPTER 8

LAJTHA'S CHORAL ACTIVITIES AND CHORAL WORKS

In his role as professor at the National Conservatory in Budapest, Lajtha taught composition, music theory, aesthetics, music history, chamber music and ethnomusicology. Additionally, until 1922, he conducted the Conservatory choir. Between 1927 and 1929 he was the executive director of the first Hungarian chamber choir, the Budapest Motet and Madrigal Society, founded in June 1923 for the performance of Renaissance vocal polyphony and works by twentieth-century masters. Between 1928 and 1944 he was the conductor of the "Goudimel" chorus attached to the Budapest congregation of the Calvinist Church, which employed professional singers. In the fall of 1929, at the Festival of Reformation, Lajtha conducted several of Bach's motets with the "Goudimel" choir.[103]

His activities in the field of choral music coincided with the development and strengthening of the choral movement which had begun at the turn of the century with the establishment of various ensembles formed by the working class and various choral societies. One of the most enthusiastic figures in the popularization of Western choral repertoire was Emil Lichtenberg, a young conductor of the Budapest Opera House, who performed, among other compositions, Brahms's *German Requiem*, Mozart's *Requiem* and several works by Bartók and Kodály.[104] 1923, the year of the première of Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* conducted by Ernő Dohnányi, is probably the year from which Hungarians should date the beginnings of the Hungarian choral renaissance.

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[103] János Breuer, "Lajtha László a "Régizenész"," *Muzsika* 35, no. 4 (1992): 5-6.

[104] Maróti Gyula and Révész László, *Öt Évszázad a Magyar Énekkari Kultúra Történetéből* (Budapest: Népművelődési propaganda iroda), 77-80.

Despite the popularity of Kodály's choral works among musicians and choral conductors, the *Rózsavölgyi Publishing Company* remained mistrustful of these new choral works and would take the responsibility of publishing them only in the event that caution-money had been paid. However no one had the money to pay that relatively high amount in advance.[105] "At the songfests of the country decked with flags the *ungarische Einheit* was still propagandized by the old and conservative nationalist repertoire of the ultra-right-wing."[106]

Although neither Bartók nor Lajtha composed as many or such popular works for choruses as did Kodály, Lajtha's individual voice and individual compositional technique resulted in some interesting and excellent works. Between 1932 and 1940, after gaining much practical experience in the field of choral music through working with various vocal ensembles as discussed earlier in this chapter, Lajtha wrote nine secular choruses for mixed choirs:

Two Choruses op. 16 (1932) written on poems of Lajos Aprily;
Chanson et Rondel op. 23 (1936) written on poems of Charles d'Orléans;
Four Madrigals op. 29 (1939) written on poems of Charles d'Orléans;
Hol járt a dal op. 32 (1940) written on a poem by Lajos Aprily.

Some particular stylistic features of selected secular works have been previously discussed. The French experience in this period of Lajtha's life is of the greatest importance, and his secular works reflect that experience in terms of the choice of their text[107] and their musical style. These compositions do not show similarities with other Hungarian choral compositions of the same period. Both op. 16 and op. 22 were

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[105] Ibid., 113.

[106] Ibid., 106.

[107] According to Berlász's research, all Lajtha's secular works were intended to be performed both in French and Hungarian. Berlász, "Műfajszerű Gondolkodás I," 105.

premiered by the *Triton* Society in Paris.[108]

The religious choral works (*Missa in tono phrygio in diebus tribulationis* op. 50; *Missa pro choro mixto et organo* op. 54; *Magnificat* op. 60; *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge* op. 65) represent a stylistic continuation of these secular choral compositions. The next chapter attempts to reveal the historic climate in which the composer's sacred works were written.

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[108] Ibid.

CHAPTER 9

MUSICAL LIFE IN HUNGARY IN THE 1950s

The progressive breakup of the Western musical system in the first half of the century, epitomized by "abandoning tonality in the traditional sense,"[109] continued unabated after the Second World War. Composers of the 1950s accepted the principle of the twelve-tone system of the Second Viennese School, and by modification and extension of its principles, created a musical style commonly associated with two centres, the cities of Darmstadt and Warsaw. Because of the changes in the political situation in Hungary, however, this new musical language, based on the principles of micro-forms of Webern's music and the principles of serialism, did not take root in Hungarian musical composition. The music of French, German, Italian and Polish contemporaries was similarly unfamiliar to the general public.

The musical scene in Hungary after the Second World War was largely dominated by Kodály's style, best described as "folkloristic nationalism."[110] Kodály became the most respected composer of the period after the war, receiving the highest government decorations in 1947, 1952 and 1962, in addition to three Kossuth Prizes in 1948, 1952 and 1957. Thanks to the support of the cultural authorities, he lived to see his compositions performed and his ambitious plans in the fields of folk-music and music education realized. In spite of the fact that his compositional style represented a very conservative direction as compared to the more progressive trends of the time, it fitted the objectives defined by the current cultural politics as expounded by Andrei Zhdanov, one of the leading Soviet theoreticians on art, philosophy, and music. In

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[109] Arnold Schoenberg, "Problems of Harmony," *Schoenberg*, ed. Merle Armitage (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 300.

[110] Kroó, 42.

January 1948, Soviet composers were summoned to a conference by the Central Committee of the Communist Party, at which they were taken to task by Zhdanov. Zhdanov urged them to base their works upon folk-song, to concentrate on operatic and program music, and admonished them not to allow their interest in rhythm to tempt them away from the primacy of melody. The government point of view was embodied in the Decree of 1948, which criticized Shostakovich, Prokofiev and others for their formalist tendencies.

While the post-war years in Western Europe were characterized by a freer, creative atmosphere, the musical philosophy of the Soviet Union had a great deal of impact on Hungarian musical life when it was placed under the administration of the state in 1949.[111] It was not until the 1960s, a period characterized by more Western orientation in musical style, that composers were allowed the freedom to find their own true and renewed artistic voices.[112] The nationalist style of the 1950s was mostly shallow and gravitated to triviality. The new social culture encouraged the repetition of clichés and imitation while deterring the development of creative thought. As Kroó put it, "The composers of the era were only shown a fraction of the sky and they measured the universe according to that."[113] Any initiatives for the renewal of the content of musical art were censured by the state. Musical compositions were publicly displayed, controlled and judged by the *Society of Musical Artists* on a biennial basis.[114] It was an unwritten rule that current trends in music should express happiness by the formal vehicles of the classical song, sonata, rondo forms and chord progressions distilled from Kodály's works. The most favoured musical genres included the *divertimento* and

[111] The period between 1949 and 1953 is a time that marks the establishment of various musical institutions organized under the supervision of the Communist Party and the state, in order to control musical activities in the country .

[112] The most prominent figure of that period is György Kurtág.

[113] Kroó, 47.

[114] Ibid., 45.

serenade. Neither allowed for the expression of individual ideas by this official levelling and trimming of everything according to one approved pattern. These genres were supposed to express the most important public function of music: high spirits, optimistic outlook on life and reassuring harmony. The compositional styles became rigid, eventually obliterating all individuality. Composers were no longer able to fill the form with real content. The compositions of the period included incidental music, mass songs, pioneer marches, folk cantatas, oratorios and programme symphonies, all affirming the new social form of the country.

During these years, the darkest age of the Communist regime, Lajtha, deprived of ~~any~~ leading position and of his passport, was neglected, insecure and weighed down by anxieties. He managed to preserve a situation for himself which allowed him to be exempt from writing incidental music for commissions in the service of the regime. He refused to compose in the uniform and monotonous style demanded by the state administration. His contract with Leduc, protected by copyright, was also acknowledged in Hungary, and therefore put Lajtha in a privileged situation. After the war Lajtha's music was published exclusively by Leduc. Whenever Leduc ordered a composition from him he could evidently refuse other Hungarian commissions. In a letter to Leduc he writes:

> The Ministry of Public Education would like to commission a piece from me. I explained to them that I was not able to fulfill the request because I had to write a symphony for your publishing company that would take me the whole winter and spring. They accepted your privilege.[115]

Lajtha managed to remain a free composer, as did Kodály, in a period when everyone else was obliged to echo the actual political contents in compositions. In another letter to his publisher Lajtha wrote:

> We are only two, who cannot be pressed for writing "timely" compositions: Kodály, due to the contract with his English publishing

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[115] Berlász, "Lajtha László Leduc Kiadóhoz Intézett Levelei II," 167.

company, and me, due to mine with Leduc.[116]

Commencing in1952, his personal correspondence with Alphonse Leduc and Leduc's son, Gilbert, was carried by the postal service of the French Embassy. This possibility was offered to Lajtha by the director of the Budapest French Institute. In this way he could be sure that his letters got to his publisher in Paris without going through the common censorship procedure.[117]

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[116] Ibid., 163.

[117] Ibid., 164.

CHAPTER 10

LAJTHA'S RELIGIOUS COMPOSITIONS AND THE *MAGNIFICAT* IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The 1950s was the period when Lajtha composed his most significant symphonic works as well as all his religious compositions, including the *Magnificat* for treble voices with organ accompaniment. Predictably, his religious compositions could not achieve popularity during this time of uniformity. Not only was his music viewed by the authorities as politically incorrect and disloyal, but it also sounded unfamiliar to the audience because the works to which his compositions were most strongly indebted stylistically were also foreign to the general public in Hungary.

In a current article István Riba summarizes the situation of the Church during the Communist regime.[118] He summarizes how the Communist regime perceived the churches as political enemies and expropriated Church lands without compensation, disbanded all Catholic voluntary organizations without an approved reason and nationalized Catholic schools. All clerical forces considered reactionary were liquidated by arrests, internment and death sentence during the regime. People who kept their religious observance were excluded from everyday employment.

One of the most individual characteristics of Lajtha's whole career as a composer, already outlined in previous chapters, was his strong wish to establish a sovereign and independent creative personality. He openly undertook responsibility for his opposition and composed church music during the darkest years of the Communist regime.

His religious compositions comprise the following:

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[118] István Riba, "Church and the State in Hungary after 1945," *Hungarian Quarterly* 37 (Winter 1996): 100-101.

Missa in tono phrygio in diebus tribulationis, op. 50 (1950); first performed in a live broadcast of the Hungarian Radio on September 9th, 1957 (at a very late hour!). The first public performance was not given until the Spring Festival in 1989.
Missa pro choro mixto et organo, op. 54 (1952); first performed in Paris in 1960. In the 1960s and 1970s it was performed in the chapel of the Franciscan Order in Budapest.
(In his letter attached to the score of his op. 54 Mass for mixed choir sent to his publisher in Paris through the French Embassy postal service he asked Gilbert Leduc to refer to the composition simply as a "Work" for mixed chorus, so that Hungarian authorities would not come to learn of his religious composition.)[119]
Magnificat op. 60 (1954); first performed in Paris(?) on November 21, 1954.
Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge op. 65 (1958); first performed in Potsdam, New York on April 28, 1962.

In the Roman Catholic church, the *Magnificat*, Mary's song of praise to God when her cousin Elizabeth greeted her as mother of the Lord, is sung with an antiphon near the end of the Vespers service. The canticle was originally chanted to a canticle tone. The *Liber Usualis* lists eight different tones, in addition to eight solemn tones for use at principal events. The text of the *Magnificat* is found in the first chapter of the Gospel according to Luke which, in the Catholic liturgy, was regularly read during Vespers. Among the first composers to set the text polyphonically was John Dunstable (ca.1380-1453), the early English Renaissance master, whose *Magnificat* was found in a single source, the Modena manuscript.[120]

During the Renaissance, the *Magnificat* was a popular text to be set polyphonically. The setting of the *Magnificat* text occupied a significant place in the life-work of the Netherlander Orlando di Lasso (1532-1594) and the Italian Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (ca.1525-1594), the former with some seventy and the latter with some forty settings. Most of the polyphonic settings of the *Magnificat* until the seventeenth century reflect the practice of using the monophonic church chant and its

[119] Berlász, "Lajtha László Leduc kiadóhoz intézett levelei II," 170.

[120] András Pernye, Introduction to *Magnificat*, by John Dunstable, ed. Pernye András (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1976), 2.

eight different melodic tones. The use of the various canticle tones, which had to be in the same mode as the antiphon preceding and following, shows a great variety of examples including simple harmonization of the tone placed in the top part, cantus firmus technique, paraphrase technique and the verse-by-verse setting alternating the plainchant with polyphonic setting of the text.

The greatest early Baroque *Magnificat* settings are those of Monteverdi concluding the Vespers of 1610 and Schütz's *Magnificat*, both written in the Baroque *concertato* style. In "Vivaldi's Magnificat for four-part choir, soloists and strings the familiar late Baroque design is fully established."[121] The Lutheran Church retained the *Magnificat* text. In Leipzig during Bach's tenure as cantor the *Magnificat* was sung in German at the Vesper service and in Latin on Christmas Day. Bach wrote his *Magnificat* for his first Christmas at Leipzig, in 1723.

During the Classical period a "symphonic style of *Magnificat* setting"[122] became the common practice, subordinating the text to the musical design. "In the final movement of Mozart's *Vesperae solemnes de Confessore* K339 (1780) the words of the *Magnificat* become almost completely subservient to the single sonata-form *allegro*."[123] No significant setting of the *Magnificat* dates from the nineteenth century. Mendelssohn set the text following the Renaissance *a cappella* tradition in his *Drei Motetten* op. 69 along with a setting of *Nunc Dimittis* and *Jubilate Deo*. Liszt set the text in the last movement of his *Dante Symphony* for female choir (occasionally performed by children's voices). "Modern composers, however, returned to the text with new inspiration."[124] Significant settings include those by Alan Hovhaness in 1958, Lennox

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[121] *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 6th ed., s.v. "Magnificat," by Ruth Steiner, Winfried Kirsch, and Roger Bullivan, 498.

[122] Ibid., 499.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Ibid.

Berkeley in 1968 and Krzysztof Penderecki in 1974.[125] A significant recent setting of the *Magnificat* (1987) is that of the Canadian Imant Raminsh.

[125] The information is gathered from the "Magnificat" entry in *New Grove*.

CHAPTER 11

MAGNIFICAT OP. 60

From one of Lajtha's letters to his editor and the date indicated on the score we learn that the *Magnificat* was published by Leduc in the fall of 1955.[126] In his letter to the editor Lajtha expressed gratitude to Alphonse Leduc for the printed score, especially because it was published a month before the deadline previously set. In the same letter Lajtha also made an enquiry about the price of the score and the parts, because a choir in Budapest had expressed its intention to perform the work. The manuscript of the *Magnificat* was most probably sent to Paris by the courier of the French Embassy, as was most of Lajtha's music at that time.

The dedication of the work says the following: *A Marguerite G. et ses petites soeurs.* The person behind the name is Margit Tóth (translated as Marguerite in French), a colleague of Lajtha at the Ethnographical Museum. The letter G. stands for Gertrudis, the name used by Tóth in the Cistercian Order, of which she was a member. This not-widely-known information was gathered from Mária Mohay Katanics's memoirs about László Lajtha.[127] According to her, Lajtha dedicated the work to Margit Tóth and her Sisters of the Cistercian Order during their seclusion.

The first performance of the *Magnificat* was most likely held in Paris. In a letter dated September 15th, 1954 addressed to his sons,[128] Lajtha indicates only the date of the performance, but not the location. The first performance of the piece happened before the work was actually printed, and Lajtha knew about the performance

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[126] Berlász, "Lajtha Lászlónak a Leduc Kiadóhoz Intézett Levelei II," 174.

[127] Mária Mohay Katanics, "Lajtha László," *Magyar Zene* 34 (1993): 87.

[128] Lajtha's two sons emigrated earlier and settled in the West. His elder son, Abel Lajtha, is a brain researcher living in the United States; his younger son, László Lajtha, is currently a professor at the Institute for Cancer Research in Manchester, England.

at least two months in advance. In this communication Lajtha gives his sons a beautiful and detailed guide to the composition, which forms the base for this writer's analysis and interpretation of Lajtha's musical intention.

Analytical notes to Lajtha's letter to his sons about the *Magnificat*

> I have long disliked the loud, trumpeting and Baroque-like *maestoso fortes* of the Magnificats written by Bach and other composers. What is the Magnificat? It is the Virgin Mary's prayers for thanksgiving. . . . What else could Mary sing about but her gratitude to God for her motherhood. . . . Where are the shoutings, where are the loud words in the text? Why have *fortissimo* chorus and orchestra? It is not a psalm, in which we praise God with loud voices, but it is a canticle sung by a young maid, who is barely a woman, in the voice of a maiden on the banks of the river Genezareth. I received the image from painters rather than composers. Have you seen the face of the Madonna on Botticelli's "Magnificat"? How sadly she smiles, gently, tenderly, with a certain type of impalpable melancholy. All those [painters] whom I like appeared in my imagination; those who came after Giotto's school before Michelangelo, whom [the latter] I do not count among those favoured painters. He [Michelangelo] also fell behind his predecessors as did the clumsy and plump Germans. In my vision I can see delicate, gracious, beautifully drawn, sometimes fragily depicted, sometimes noble, Italian, French and Flemish Madonnas before Rogier van der Weiden [*sic*], also Raphael's painting of the Madonna with a misty veil on her head in the Louvre, all of them come back to my imagination from the distance of forty years (who knows when I can see them again ?), they all stand in front of me as models stand in front of a painter. Fra Angelico [depicts the Madonna] like a fairy with colours that are still so fresh-looking, he puts haloes of gold around the head of his Madonnas with loving care, and the others, they all showed me what I had to do. I wrote the composition for female choir and organ. (The organ is not simply an accompanying instrument here!)[128]

Bach not only set the Magnificat text in a festive way but used the largest orchestra available to him in his time: three trumpets, timpani, flutes, oboes, bassoons, strings, organ and a chorus divided into five parts combined with soloists. This joyous and festive sound was what Lajtha refused to evoke in his own setting of the *Magnificat*

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[128] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 226-231. All indented citations in this chapter are translations by the author of this essay of Lajtha's letter to his sons.

text.

Three of Lajtha's four religious compositions--the *Missa pro choro mixto et organo* op. 54, the *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge* op. 65 and the *Magnificat* op. 60--were written for chorus with organ, the latter two being written for choirs of equal voices. Lajtha continues his description of the work as follows:

> Loudness, wide gestures, trumpeting angels, all these are not to be found in my *Magnificat*. Delicacy, grace, beauty, tenderness, humbleness--are [part of the work]. . . . I also took the large palette [like the painters]: all the colours are on it--however I used the thinnest brush, I even twirled the end of it so it could draw just like a sharpened pencil--and I put on the colours as softly as breath. This unusual and, to my opinion, first *Magnificat* written in such a style starts with a remarkably and unusually long organ prelude. At first the organ exposes a fantasy on the theme of the later choral entrance . . . then it [the organ] presents two tender melodies both stated twice.

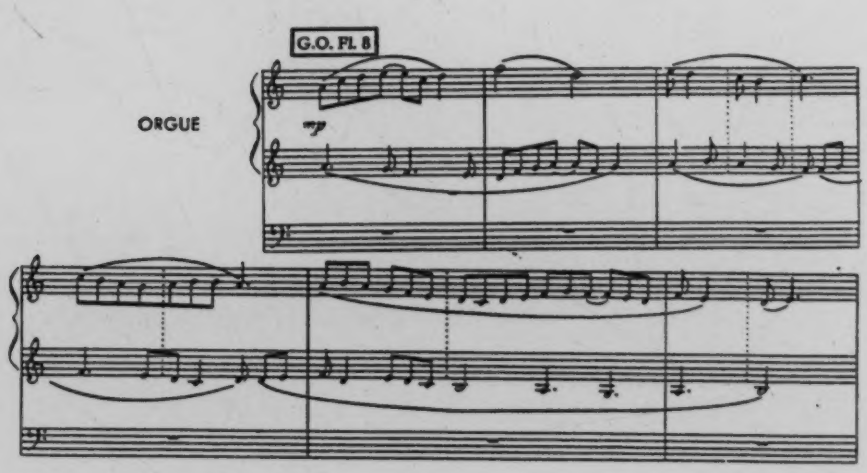
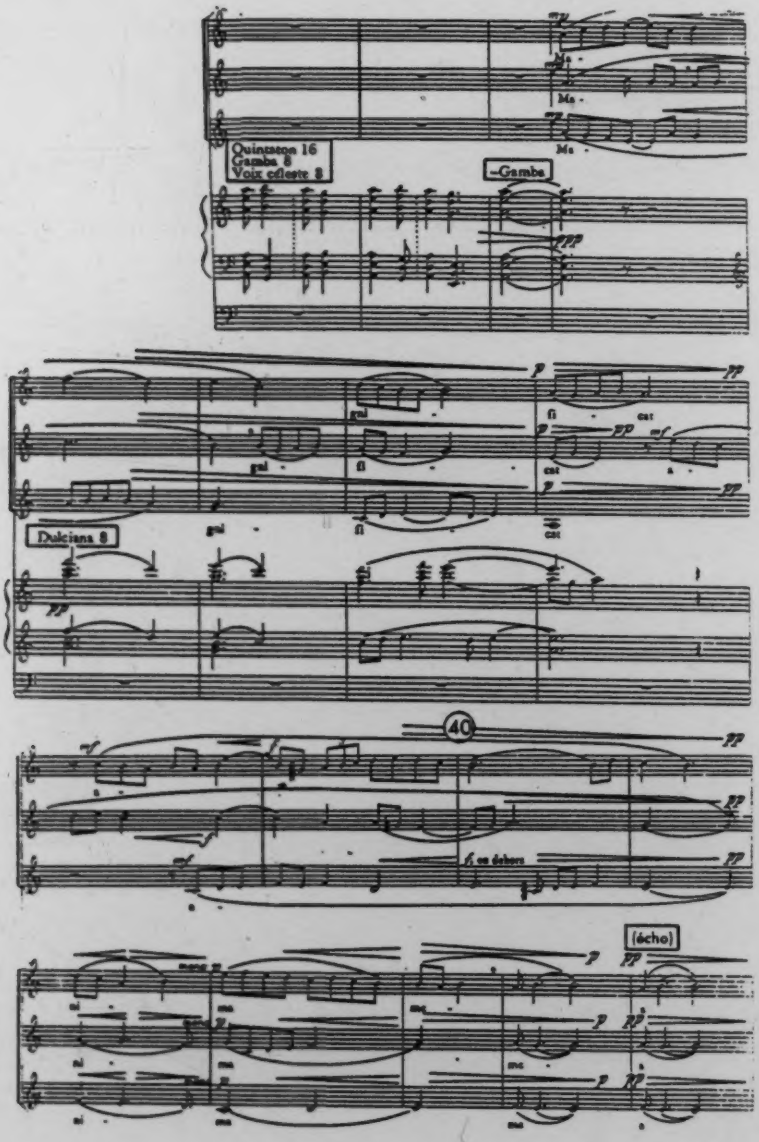
Figure 31. *Magnificat*, op. 60, mm. 1-6.[130] "a fantasy on the theme of the later choral entrance"

[130] Measure numbers indicated in the score by *Leduc* are inconsistent. Miscounting occurs starting from bar number 60. Number 90 is correct; however, the bar numbers following are also inconsistent. In the analysis the writer refers to the correct numbers. Bars indicated by broken lines are not counted as separate measures.

Figure 32.[131] mm. 30-46. (the same theme as heard in the choral parts)



[131] All examples in this chapter are from the *Magnificat* op.60.

The first theme (see fig. 31) is a gently flowing heptatonic melody written in the style of early music. The organ introduces this naturally-arched melodic line in an arrangement of freely-flowing symmetrical and nonsymmetrical metric units. The music is reminiscent of a finely-constructed subject of a Renaissance motet. Lajtha omits the use of any metric signs in order to create a steady and tender flow of the music without any obvious and enforced sense of metric pulsation, also reflective of chant and Renaissance polyphony. In the prelude of the work the counterpoint to the theme in the lower part fills out the rhythmic movement of the melody with eighth-notes below the quarter- and half-notes of the theme, thus making the flow of the tune even more constant and endless.

The theme of figure 31 is further elaborated at the choral entrance starting at measure 33, as shown in figure 32. The rhythmic flow and the melodic lines of the individual voices are once again finely connected to each other as in a Renaissance motet. Lajtha most probably became acquainted with the mastery of Renaissance polyphony during his studies at the *Schola Cantorum* in Paris. Both his compositions and his activities as a conductor and teacher show that he was among the first in Hungary to work on the revival of Renaissance style and early music.[132] Lajtha's motet style in the *Magnificat* is, however, more than just imitation of the typically Renaissance form. To the music he adds his own ideas. In the examples above one can notice the way he embellishes the structure through tiny nonsymmetrical rhythmic interplays, such as the compound meter in measure 41 or the duple and triple change in measure 39. The sound is also "modern" in the sense that the vocal lines are woven together in such a way that, except for the start and the end, consonant harmonic sonorities can rarely be heard. In the sonorous material, however, one can also sense the influence of the early French polyphony discussed in chapter 7. The constant presence of non-harmonic notes creates

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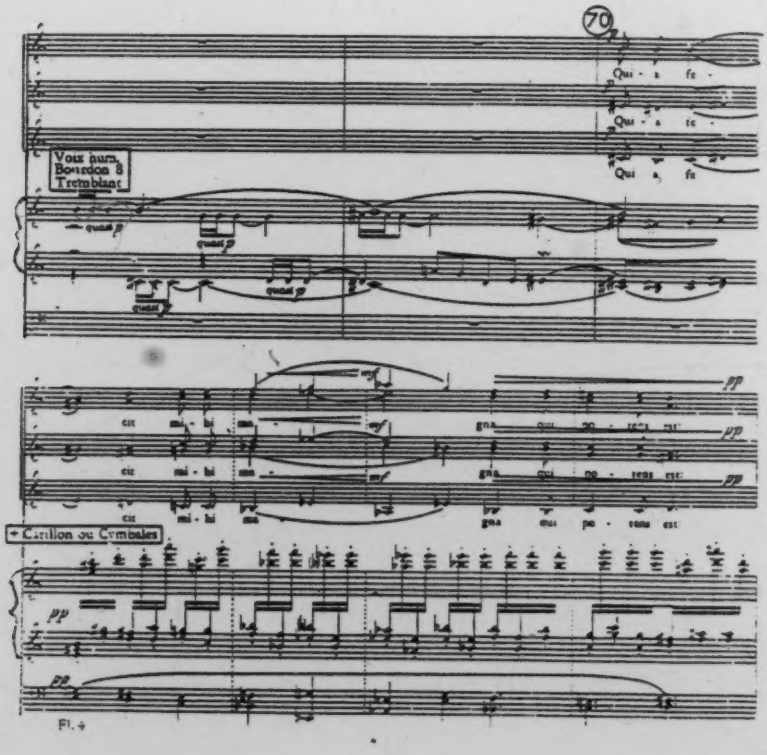
[132] For a detailed discussion of the subject see Breuer, "Lajtha László, a "Régizenész"," 4-7.

a certain weightless, hovering sound which drives toward cadential points.

Throughout the work, whenever the text refers to the Lord and His power, as a contrast to the setting of the text at other places, the music is dominated by major chords in root position (see fig. 33).

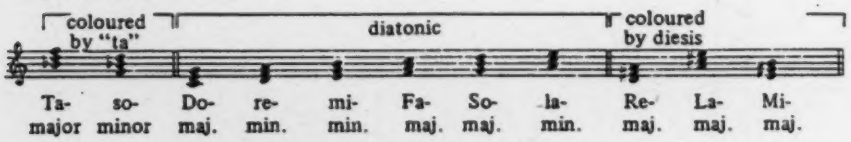
Figure 33. mm. 68-70.



A rhythmic fanfare-like introduction to this section provides a preparation for the outburst of major chords in the choral part. The power of God is depicted here by the exclusive use of consonant triads in the harmony: "Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est . . ." (Who hath done great things to me . . .). The harmonic progression can best be interpreted as a Renaissance progression of triads built on the different degrees of the tone-set. In the harmonic analysis which follows (see fig. 35), Lajos Bárdos' system of

Renaissance chord sets is used. According to Bárdos, the basic chord set of the modal style is created by the perfect fifth, root position triads and sixth chords formed by the notes of the eleven-note tone-set, as well as by the cadential diminished triads in first inversion, referred to as diminished 6-chords in the illustration by Hegyi.[133]

Figure 34.[134]

a) Perfect fifth triads:

b) the cadential diminished 6-chords:

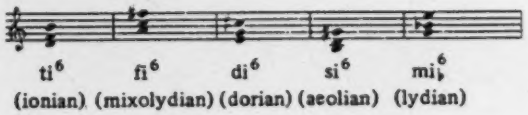
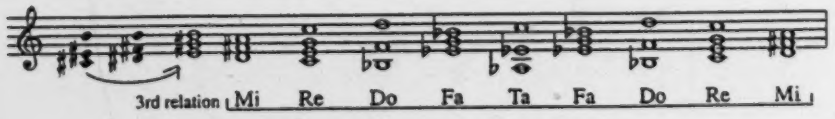



Figure 35.



A similar musical idea returns at the words "timentibus eum" (that fear him) (see fig. 36).

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[133] For further reference and practical study see Lajos Bárdos, *Modális Harmóniák* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1979).

[134] Illustration by Erzsébet Hegyi, *Stylistic Knowledge on the Basis of the Kodály Concept*, vol. 1 (Kecskemét: Pedagogical Institute of Music, 1984), 61.

Figure 36. mm. 81-85.

Similarly, the succession of three major chords (B-flat Major, G Major, D Major, the last two being third-relations of the first) at the word "Dominum" (The Lord), starting from measure 47, brings the endlessly-flowing polyphonic music into a more harmonically conceived progression.

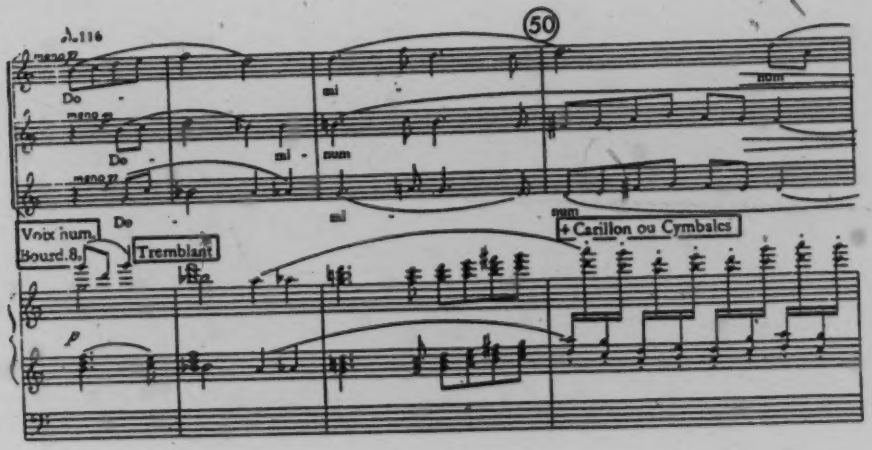
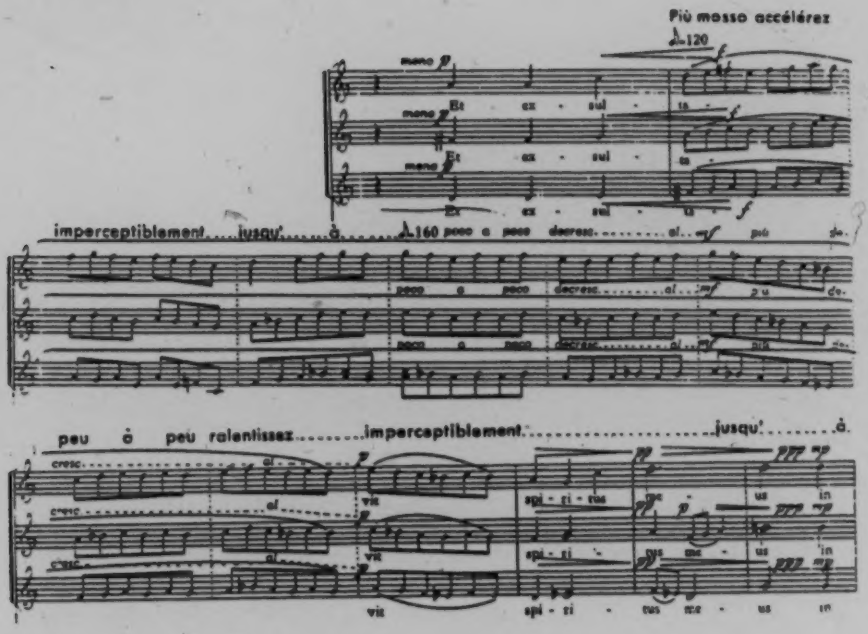
Figure 37. mm. 47-51.

The contrary movement which dominated the counterpoint of the previous section, "Magnificat anima mea . . ." (My soul doth magnify . . .), changes into parallel gestures at the word "Dominum" (The Lord)(see fig. 37), later bursting out into a long melismatic progression of chord mixtures at "Et exultavit spiritus meus" (And my spirit hath rejoiced) (see fig. 38). This is also a fine example of madrigalesque word-painting.

Figure 38. mm. 53-57.

Here is what Lajtha had to say about these passages:

> . . . at the appropriate places . . . the voices begin to vocalize for long passages, they start to ripple, and softly move together in harmony, up and down, down and up—the organ plays the same material but in contrary motion so that these passages sound as if the happy and young mother's soul would overflow the whole world, gently undulating, or . . . a hovering chorus of angels would sing above the sea, gentle as a lake tenderly rippled by the breeze.

Further ideas for word-painting include verse 7, which is built around two complementary phrases, descending and ascending, for "deposuit" and "exaltavit," thus describing the motions in a picturesque Baroque-like way (see figs. 39, 40).

Figure 39. mm. 102-108.

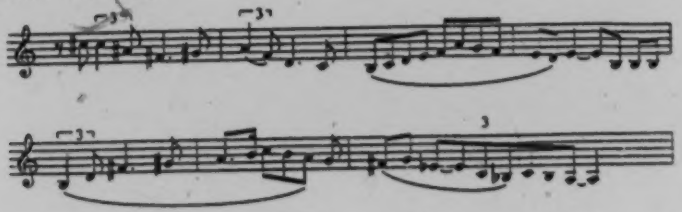
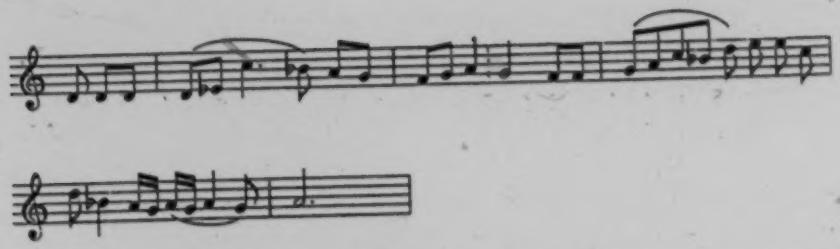
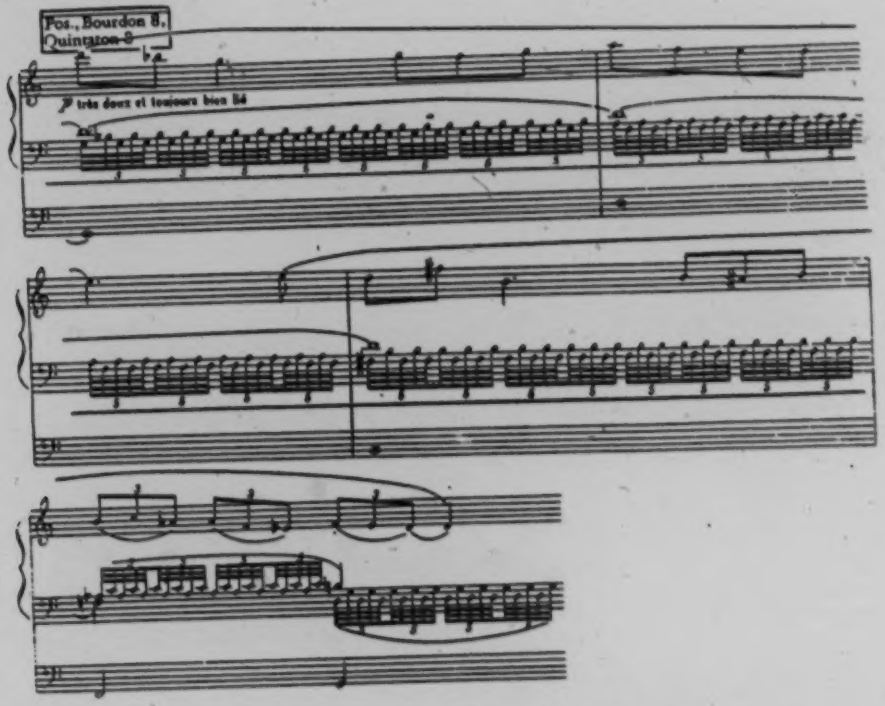


Figure 40. mm.108-113.



The first modal theme of the organ prelude quoted in figure 31 is followed by a rather harmonically-conceived melody given in figure 41.

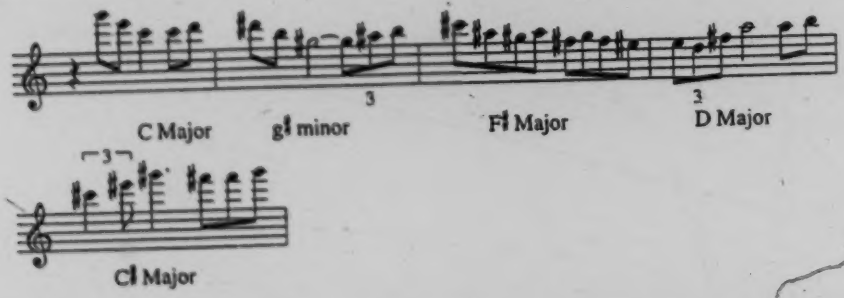
Figure 41. mm. 9-12.



This organ theme is a lyric melody developed out of four equal, one-measure-long fragments, all of which expose minor triads in G minor, D minor, B minor and F minor. The last two relate to the D minor triad as minor third-related chords. The beautiful colour of the underlying and shimmering quintuplets played with a flute stop on the

swell manual in the accompanying left hand, reinforces the harmonic progression outlined in the tune and finally closes the harmony on a G Major chord. The melodic material is developed by expansion and variation of this motif.

Figure 42. mm. 15-19.



In contrast to the previous minor melody, this latter one starts and ends on broken major triads, again underlined in the accompaniment. This time the third relations exist between more distant keys, such as the key of C Major (measure 1) and G-sharp minor (measure 2), or between C Major and the key of D-sharp minor in measure 3. While the theme shown in figure 41 is constantly descending, in the variation of the tune (see fig. 42) the descending figures are juxtaposed by ascending directions. The rhythmic flow becomes more active due to the combination of the duple and triple meters. The third-related harmonic relationships building up the theme make the melody sound like a late Romantic *cantabile* tune. The delicate atmosphere comes to an end with a loud outburst on the organ. Lajtha writes the following about this passage:

> The tender atmosphere is absent when the organ tutti rises into a dissonant *fortissimo*, appearing twice [figs. 43, 44] between two themes, ending on a consonant chord in such a way that the top note of the harmony is held alone . . . .

Figure 43. m. 13.

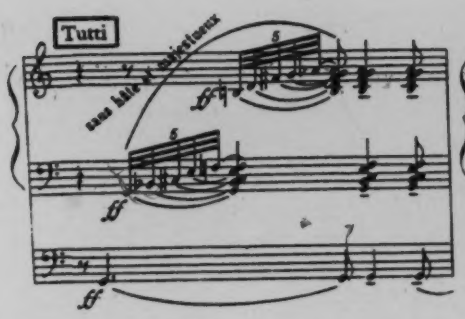
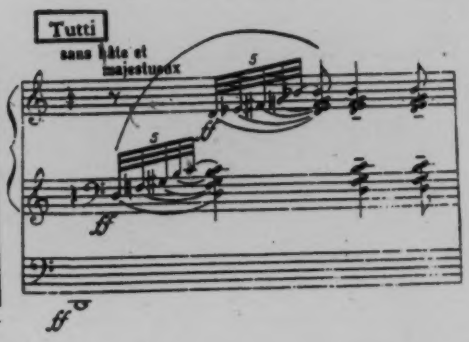



Figure 44. m. 20.

The tone clusters are built from nine discrete pitches. The first four notes of both arpeggiations build up diminished-seventh chords; the one in example 43 is the diminished-seventh of D minor, and the one in Example 44 is the diminished-seventh chord of A minor. Most of the top five notes expose semitone dissonances in their relationship to the notes of the diminished-seventh chords. Lajtha continues:

> I think that a very tender recitativo melody [see fig. 45] is wedged among the themes [of the prelude] . . . it is a little bit chant-like, however Lajtha-like modern . . . [and] expressive. The last melody [see fig. 46] ends with soft, archaic-like chords [see fig. 47] after which the choir enters.

Figure 45. m. 21.

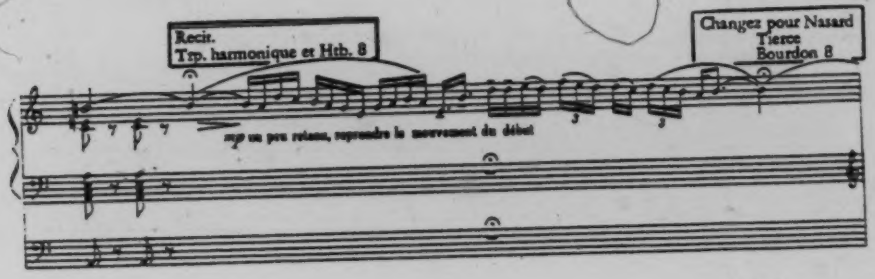


Figure 46. mm. 26-29.

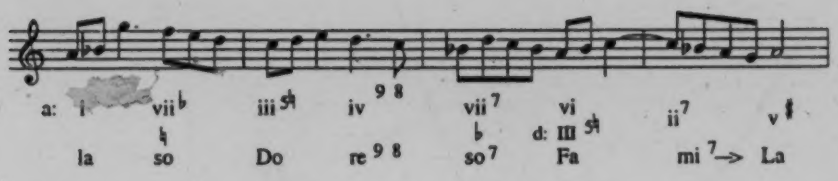


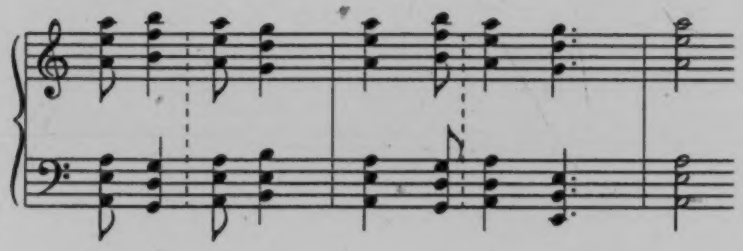
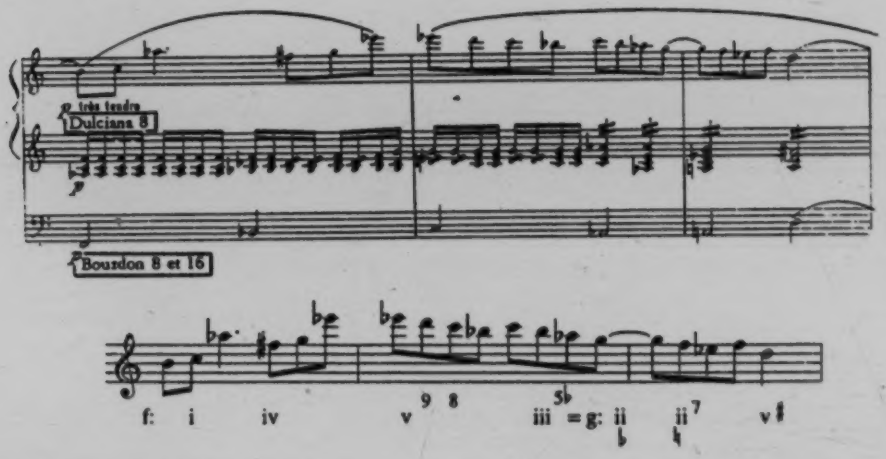
Figure 47. mm. 30-32.

The last melody of the prelude, shown in figure 46 is once again the expansion and variation of another theme (see fig. 48).

Figure 48. mm. 22-24.

As already stated, Lajtha's flowing thematic invention often consists of individual themes freely and widely developed and varied, thus creating larger musical units. In this way

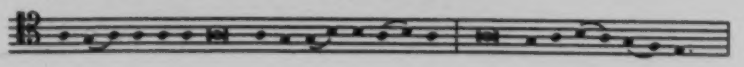
he manages to hold together long musical progressions in which the elements are organically linked to each other. Although he states two distinct themes--referred to as two tender melodies in his letter--in the prelude of the *Magnificat* (see figs. 41 and 48), he does not contrast them sharply in a Classical way but rather connects them by the similarity of their mood. The way in which the second theme unfolds is more tonally defined and therefore less vibrant and elusive than the first one. While in the first theme the triads are connected by third relations, the second theme has more tonal implications (see figs. 46, 48). The accompaniment becomes more direct by the omission of the shimmering and vibrating quintuplets. The music reflects the colours of a mysterious landscape fading to make way for the words of the human being, represented by the chorus. The harmonic progression in figure 46 can once again be more clearly interpreted as a Renaissance progression because of the omission of the leading tone of the minor key and the constant use of B-flat (flattened seventh in C Major). The closing harmonies of the prelude recall the sound of Medieval *organum* (see fig. 47).

Lajtha comments about the canticle tones used in the *Magnificat*:

> In the course of the work I cite the three different tones of the Gregorian *Magnificat* melody from the *Liber officii* three times. The chorus that is only occasionally homophonic . . . sings in unison at these sections. These Gregorian chants are accompanied by very low notes of the organ pedal above which a *douce flûte* can be heard playing a melody independent from the reciting chorus.

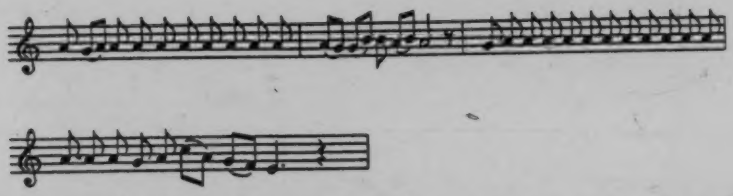
Figure 49.[135]

"Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae, ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes" (For he hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed).

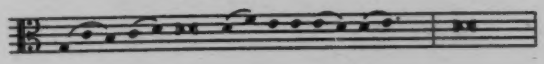


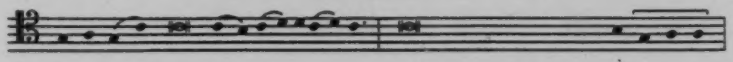
[135] Illustration from *Liber Usualis*, ed. The Benedictines of Solesmes (Tournai: Desclée Company, 1962).

Lajtha's version:



"Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui" (He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts).



"Sicut locutus est ad Patres nostros, Abraham et semini ejus in saecula" (As He spake to our fathers, Abraham and his seed for ever).

The three *Magnificat* tones that Lajtha cites are tone 4 (hypophrygian), tone 7 (mixolydian) and tone 8 (hypomixolydian) in order of appearance in figure 49. Except for tone 4, all the citations are the same version as found in the *Liber usualis* (see fig. 49). Lajtha's remark on organ registration in the letter concerning the use of the flute stops is very illuminating especially in the case of the last recitation--"Sicut locutus est" (As He spake to our fathers)--where organ registration is not indicated in the score by Leduc. The *douce flûte* that Lajtha had in mind is a French name for the straight flute that had an especially tender and delicate tone and was used until the middle of the eighteenth century (yet another indication of the influence of early music in Lajtha's writing). Lajtha uses the *Magnificat* chant as well as all other traditional patterns of Western Classical music, to which he adheres with all the subtlety at his command, smoothly interweaving the chant melodies among his other themes. The totally different stylistic ingredients of his music are integrated with much creative fantasy. The transitions from one idea to the other are always smooth and logical.

> The text of the *Magnificat* is divided into twelve verses. Before the sixth verse "fecit potentiam" there is another long organ interlude presenting a new melody [see fig. 50], that continues the choral section which fades away with ethereal purity; it [the musical material] rises and rises until it reaches a luminous *fortissimo*: a chorale-like tune, Mary's hymn played on the organ [see fig. 51].

Figure 50. mm. 85-89.

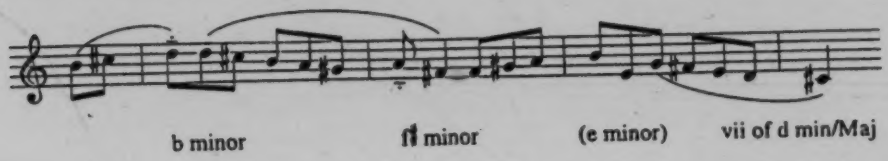
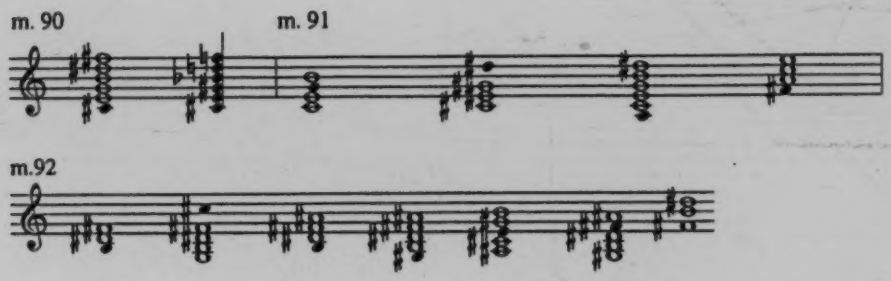


Figure 51. mm. 90-96.



The theme that Lajtha refers to as "the new theme" is placed in the lowest part of the instrumental material and is accompanied by a *toccata*-like chordal figuration in the right hand. The tonal implications are the following: B minor, F-sharp minor, E minor. The material culminates in an immense progression of chords built from pitches that are thirds away from one another (figure 51 illustrates the structure of the chords in mm. 90-92). The listener hears a succession of sound blocks gradually becoming louder, the harmony taking over the melody. The sonorous entities, building "towers" out of thirds, are moving in parallel motion until the pedal takes over, thus intensifying the power created by the chordal progression. The glory of God is expressed in full bloom, the

passion and the emotions thus far held back, bursting forth with full force, filling an imaginary cathedral with its glowing sonorities.

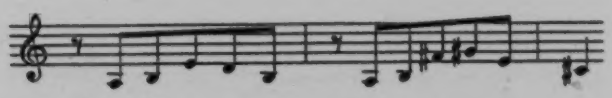
> The gold is shining, the silver is shining, the stained-glass windows let the sunshine stream in. . . . The pedal of the organ is slightly virtuoso and speech-like after which the chorus sings the *Magnificat* chant softly. . . . What other composers usually set as climax, I present purely by peeling off any Baroque or Romantic-like desire for illustration. . . . This is followed by the introductory organ themes: the first one is presented by the altos [see fig. 39], the second one [see fig. 40] is sung only by the second sopranos with organ accompaniment.

The reappearance of the themes of the prelude again promotes the integral organization of the piece. The thematic material is further developed and long *cantabile* lines bloom from the melodic ideas. Lajtha provides the following comments about the last section of the work:

> The short Gloria is depicted with exclusively soft and gentle colours--and the chorus finishes the piece with a longer but equally infinite "Amen" woven from the nicest colours, after which the organ once again discloses the beautiful, oval, blond and young face of the Madonna. . . .

The "Amen" is built polyphonically. The melismatic theme opens through expanding intervals:

Figure 52. mm. 146-148.



It is developed in free imitation. The culmination occurs in B Major, gradually descending to E Major. The vocal lines culminate in the F-sharp dominant-seventh chord in the closing measures, fade into a half-diminished-seventh chord and, failing to use a strong authentic cadence to conclude the work, return to the shining E Major triad. The glowing sound of the F-sharp Major in the organ interlude is tempered by the simplicity and limpidity of the texture.

> . . . once again the organ bursts forth with a wonderful, oval, blonde, young Madonna face devised from the Amen motif. Landscape vanishes into the blue mists of the distant background. Just as the early Renaissance Eycks, the Italians, Leonardo, open up infinite perspectives in their paintings, so the whole scene becomes transfigured as the organ's *petites cloches* in luminous E Major complete this Madonna portrait of mine.

The structure of the *Magnificat*

In this section the structure of Lajtha's *Magnificat* is examined in a verse-by-verse analysis.

Lajtha avoids the multi-movement approach to set the text of the *Magnificat*, as would be the case with most composers of the Baroque period. He sets the text in a one-movement work that is, however, divided into clear-cut sections. The structure of Lajtha's setting consists of five main parts defined by his division of the text into two parts of approximately equal length, Part One being from verse one through five, while Part Two includes verses six through twelve. An organ interlude is placed between these two sections. In terms of the number of measures in each section the symmetrical scheme of the work can be outlined in the following way:

> First section: Organ prelude. 32 measures (mm. 1-32).
> Second section: Verses 1-5. 53 measures (mm. 33-85).
> Third section: Organ interlude. 14 measures (mm. 86-98).
> Fourth section: Verses 6-12. 52 measures (mm. 99-145).
> Fifth section: "Amen" and organ postlude. 29 measures (mm. 146-174)

Despite the fact that the length of bars is constantly changing in the piece and therefore the length of the various sections can be expressed with no more than relative precision, this arrangement of the musical content creates a well-balanced feeling of form, a characteristic that is even more striking when one pays attention to the actual musical content expressed within these parts. One of Lajtha's favourite formal designs, which can also be found in the structure of the *Magnificat*, is composed out of two or more non-subordinate freely-flowing themes that are later varied and connected to the other

elements of the structure. In this way he manages to compile a closed form that very naturally takes shape. This free formal structure resembles Debussy's free formal designs. His linear and contrapuntal development of the music is a French characteristic in his works. The overall formal design of the *Magnificat* is based on constantly-recurring motifs related to each other by various means such as exact repetition of melodies or variation. Almost every motif has its counterpart placed somewhere else in the work. In the following structural analysis of the work the recurring melodic ideas are indicated by lower-case letters while other recurring motifs receive distinct names that best characterize them. References will be made to figures of the previous section of the chapter.

First section. The prelude (mm. 1-32)

Formal scheme: a; b; cluster; recitative; b'; cluster; recitative; c; c'; organum

The first section highlights some of the most important melodic statements of the piece. These motifs have already been shown in earlier examples before (a.=fig. 31; b.=fig. 41). These melodic themes, conveying the impression of great lyricism, contrast with the intervening clusters (figs. 43, 44) that change the texture and dynamics expressed in the melodic material. The sound of the softer eight-foot stops of the organ are suddenly replaced by the sound of the full instrument in measure 13. There may be an attempt here by Lajtha to draw attention momentarily to the majestic subject expressed in the text of the *Magnificat*. Lajtha marks this section with the following instruction: *sans hâte et majestueux*. Nevertheless, these interventions do not diminish the delicate quality of the work.

A delicate recitative phrase (one similar to fig. 45) which follows prepares the way for the variation of motif b. (b'.=fig. 42). Lajtha uses the very same stops of the organ at this point as before (b.) by mixing *Bourdon 8* and *Quintaton 8* to outline the tune. The sound of the accompaniment is characterized by the eight-foot

F lûte stop played on the Swell. The effect that concludes this *cantabile* sonority is the same as that of the first appearance of the cluster. The organ once again rises to a *fortissimo* dynamic level introducing a cluster with a similar set of pitches, of which the last one is held longer, thus connecting the cluster to the recitative following it (fig. 45). Lajtha registers this recitative on trumpet and oboe mixed together. This particular combination is a striking characteristic of César Franck's organ works.[136] To conclude the prelude of the work Lajtha states two more themes (c and c') with subdued dynamics in a supplicatory mood. He enriches the tender registration by the use of *Dulciana 8*, *Gamba douce 8*, *Nasard* and *Tièrce*. (c.=fig. 48; c'.=fig. 46)

The prelude concludes simply when the instrumental texture is reduced to chords in the *organum* style (fig. 47) played on *Quintaton 16*, *Gamba 8* and *Voix céleste* (celestial voice) *8*.

Second section. Verses 1-5 (mm. 33-85)

Formal scheme of verse 1 (mm. 33-51): a'; motives of " God" and "Carillon;"

verse 2 (mm. 52-63): d;

verse 3 (mm. 64-65): chant

verse 4 (mm. 66-73): motives of "God" and "Carillon;" c';

verse 5 (mm. 74-85): d'; motif of "God"

The first five verses of the *Magnificat* are set in this section of the piece. The first verse recalls theme a of the prelude sung almost entirely *a cappella* in a motet-like setting (a'=fig. 32). The word "Dominum" is marked by the entrance of the organ which initially supports the voices by harmonic accompaniment; however, later it is intensified by the sonority of carillon stops.

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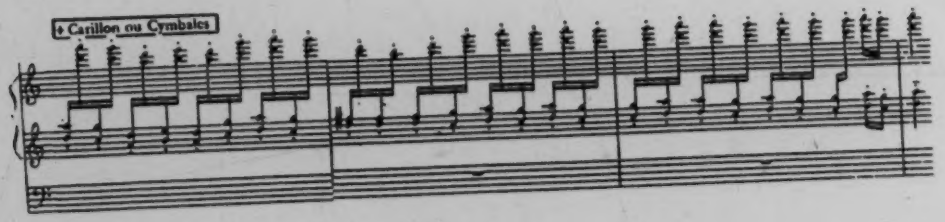
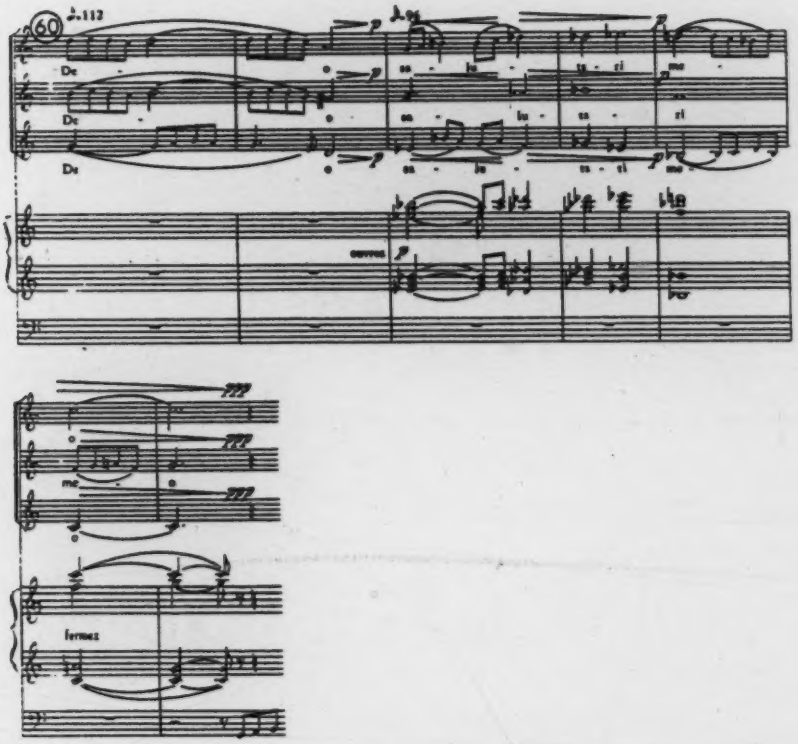
[136] The writer noticed several occurrences of this registration in *Trois Chorals* by Franck, the composer's often-performed, famous last work. César Franck, *Trois Chorals* (Paris: Durand, 1892).

Figure 53. "Carillon" motif, mm. 50-53.



Fast-moving sixteenth-note passages of fourth and fifth intervals are heard on the organ. Reference has previously been made in this chapter to Lajtha's treatment of the word "God" and expressions related to the power of God (see "God" motif in figs. 33, 36, 37). This motif, combined with the sound of carillons, transfers the musical atmosphere to majestic sonorities.

The above harmonic progression prepares the way for the melismatic series of mixtures at "Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutari meo" ("And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour") (verse 2). This is another important recurring melodic-harmonic idea and has been labelled as d. Lajtha is probably attempting to show the gentle outburst of joy of the Virgin Mary by musically depicting the words (d=fig. 38). At the mention of the word "God" the music recalls the progression of root-position triads ("God motif") in a more tender, inward-looking and prayer-like mood.

Figure 54. mm. 57-63[137]. "God" motif.

Verse 3 is sung to one of the canticle tones (tone 4) of the *Magnificat* (see fig. 49). The chant is accompanied by long-held notes in the pedal of the organ and a chant-like florid melody played on eight-foot flute stops on the great organ.

Verse 4 is essentially a restatement of the "God" motif. The difference lies in the texture. The three-part division of the voices of the chorus used to this point in the work changes into five-part division, conveying the impression of power (see fig. 33). The textural difference is strengthened by the stronger dynamic marking of *mezzoforte* in the choral part. The registration of the organ at the beginning of verse 4 uses *voix humaine*, a thin reed stop, together with *tremblant*, a type of registration also

[137] Note the incorrect measure number in the Leduc edition. According to that this motif appears in mm. 60-66.

often found among markings in César Franck's works for the organ. The carillon once again accompanies the chordal progression, depicting the phrase "Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est" ("For He that is mighty hath done to me great things"). The words "et sanctum nomen ejus" ("and holy is His name") are accompanied by the delicate motif c' in the organ transposed a fourth higher (c'=fig. 46).

The setting of the next verse of the text (verse 5) adapts musical ideas of the previous sections as well. Variations on the melismatic passage as well as on the "God motif" are stated here. The melismatic section is repeatedly used for word-painting purposes. The phrase "a progenie in progenies" ("from one generation to the other") is effectively described by the lengthy melisma, while "timentibus eum" ("those who fear him") which expresses the power of God, is dramatically depicted by the progression of root-position triads (see fig. 36). It is of interest that the key structure highlighted in the tonal centres of the various verses shows an ascending direction to this point in the text: from the starting key of A-minor the music reaches the key of B-Major by the end of the first half of the work. Chapter 12 shows these changes in tonal centres in details.

Third section. Interlude (mm. 86-98)

Formal scheme; new melody; chord towers; recitative; cluster

The interlude introduces new melodic material (see fig. 50) in which the music builds to a dramatic climax in an improvisatory style. The only recurring ideas in this section are the cluster, first heard in the prelude of the work, and a recitative, this time placed in the pedal of the organ. It is reminiscent of a Baroque *toccata* or a Baroque organ prelude, embellished with modern harmonic and melodic ideas.

Fourth section. Verses 6-12 (mm. 99-145)

verse 6 (m. 99): chant (mixolydian mode)

verse 7 (mm. 100-108): b''

verse 8 (mm. 109-113): c''

verse 9 (mm. 114-123): development of b'' and c''

verse 10 (mm. 124-129): "Carillon motif;"chant (hypomixolydian mode)

verse 11(mm. 130-136): organum; d''

verse 12 (mm. 137-145): vocal development of the "Carillon" motif

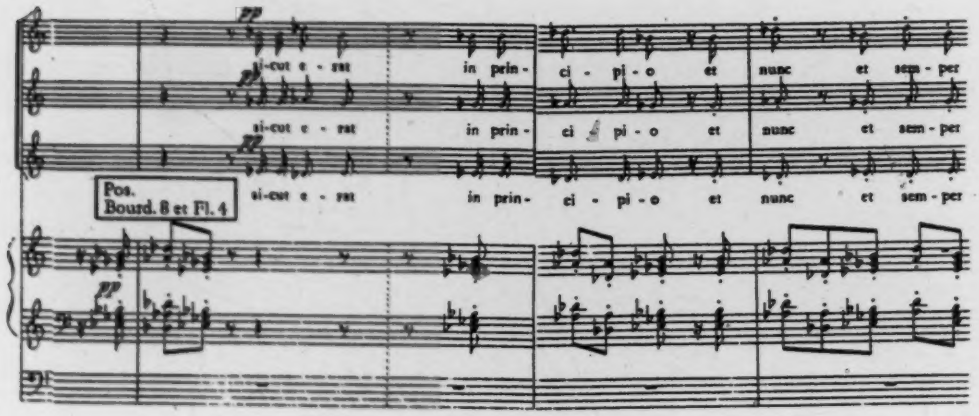
The chant of verse 6 is harmonized in the same manner as in verse 3: long-held notes in the pedal support the unison voices, accompanied by a florid chant-like phrase using a single eight-foot flute stop.

Verses 7 and 8 are derived entirely from previous material of the work, first presented in the prelude (compare fig. 39 with fig. 41 and fig. 40 with fig. 46). The accompaniment is reduced to supporting chords in verse 7; however, in verse 8 the organ part echoes the shimmering quintuplets of the prelude (*beaucoup de tendresse et de souplesse*). The following section (verse 9), "Suscepit Israel puerum suum" ("He hath holpen His servant Israel"), cannot be related to previous sections in the same sense as other motives have been. Nevertheless, the choice of solo melody with chordal accompaniment continues the texture of the two previous verses. The melody retains the *cantabile* quality, and the harmonic accompaniment of predominantly minor triad mixtures echoes the harmonic world of verse 7. The rhythmic idea expressed in the accompanying sixteenth-note patterns of the repeated harmonies is reminiscent of motif c. (see fig. 48).

A smooth transition is created by the use of the familiar "Carillon" motif, concluding in a chant for the text of verse 10 "Sicut locutus est ad Patres

nostros" ("As He spake to our fathers"). The textural difference lies in the deletion of the chant-like accompaniment on the organ.

The "Gloria" begins with a short imitative setting of the opening words followed by *organum*-like treatment of the phrase "et Filio" ("and to the Son"). The choice of melismatic chords in parallel movement at "et Spiritui Sancto" is appropriate to depict the words ("and the Holy Spirit"). The dynamic marking increases to *fortissimo*, a dynamic level not used before in similar motives. This passionate passage is replaced by a playful version of the carillon motif in the vocal texture.

Figure 55. mm. 137-139.

Fifth section. Amen (mm. 146-166) and Postlude (mm. 166-174)

Following conventional patterns of large-scale works, Lajtha concludes his work with imitative passages reminiscent of a closing fugue of large-scale works. He writes only a fugue exposition, and nothing more extensive, in keeping with the simplicity and economy of his compositional style. In the postlude Lajtha first reworks the theme of the "Amen," then recalls the carillons as he closes the work.

CHAPTER 12

SUMMARY OF STYLISTIC FEATURES OBSERVED IN THE *MAGNIFICAT*

In his *Magnificat* setting, László Lajtha draws melodic models from a wide range of stylistic periods, from Gregorian chant to the expansive and chromatic melodic invention of the Romantic period. The pre-Renaissance musical language is reflected in the use of the four tones of the *Magnificat* canticle and in the freely-flowing melodic lines that characterize Lajtha's vocal writing and that imitate the freely-unfolding nature of Gregorian chant. Rather than using symmetrical Classical melodies, Lajtha's preference is for seemingly endless melodic lines throughout the *Magnificat*. Melodies using one of the church modes as opposed to major and minor melodies are neo-Renaissance features of his compositional language. Pre-Classical music is also the source of the *cantabile* nature of his music. As opposed to many twentieth-century composers, who do not conceive their melodies in terms of what the voice can do, Lajtha's melodic lyricism is always vocal in character. The conventional intelligibility is never lost in the freshness of expression. Lajtha recognises the primacy of melody. Some of Lajtha's melodies are imbued with chromatic passages that have sheer Romantic projections.

As with his melodic ideas, his harmonic vocabulary shows the influence of earlier musical styles. The harmonic progressions of triads in root position and other ideas for madrigal-like word-painting are features of his composition rooted in the Renaissance style. The use of *organum*-like chord progressions, recalling late Medieval polyphonic music, is another archaic element in his music that can be found at several places in the *Magnificat*. The enriched harmonic resources of Romantic music, affected by the extreme use of chromaticism such as third relations, are frequently present in the *Magnificat*. While his melodic invention draws mainly on the *cantabile* melodic

quality of music from earlier periods, his harmonic language is strongly rooted in the innovations of the twentieth-century. Dissonant combinations of chords built out of a "tower" of thirds, increasing not only the dissonance of the harmony but also the volume of sound, are used in the organ part. The succession of these harmonies creates bright sonority, turning against the dominance of the harmonic clarity of Classic-Romantic music. However, Lajtha's tone clusters, the striking dissonances capable of producing tension, always resolve to clear-cut consonances. Although Lajtha uses the concept of tonality in a broad sense, the tonality often centres on one key, most often either D Major or A minor. He clearly defines the tonal centres; however, the shift from one key centre to another can be abrupt and powerful. The following key centres are found in the twelve verses of the work:

Verse 1. from A minor to D Major (shift to the Major subdominant)
Verse 2. from D Major to C Major (shift to the key of the flattened seventh degree)
Verse 3. chant - hypophrygian
Verse 4. from F-sharp Major (?) to D Major (shift to a major third related key)
Verse 5. from G minor (?) to B Major (shift to an ultra third related key)[138]
Verse 6. chant - mixolydian
Verse 7. from F-sharp Major to D Major (shift to a major third related key)
Verse 8. from D Major to A Major (shift to the dominant key)
Verse 9. from A minor to B minor (shift to the key of the second degree)
Verse10. chant - hypomixolydian
Verse 11. from E-flat Major to D-flat Major (shift to the key of the flattened seventh degree)
Verse 12. from E-flat minor to A minor (shift to a key a tritone away)
"Amen" from A Minor to E Major (shift to the dominant key; the piece comes to a halt on the dominant degree)

The first half of the work is dominated by ascending direction of key centres while the second half of the piece is best characterized by descending directions in terms of tonal centres. From A minor the music ascends to F-sharp Major and from there it descends as low as D-flat Major in verse 11.

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[138] Lajos Bárdos' terminology referring to third related keys without diatonic common tones.

Further stylistic elements found in the *Magnificat* include the vocal counterpoint influenced by the Renaissance motet style.

Similar to other twentieth-century composers, Lajtha dispenses with conventional time signatures in the piece and avoids the strict use of barlines, occasionally replacing them with broken lines. He does not even retain the barlines at places such as the rhythmic "sicut erat in principio" ("as it was in the beginning") passage where they might give some visual aid for the performer. The absence of a clearly established meter and predictable accents creates a fresh and novel rhythmic flow in the work.

Lajtha occasionally uses contrasting dynamic markings in the Romantic tradition, *ppp* and *fff* being the outer extremes. Nevertheless, the piece generally transmits a tender and delicate athmosphere.

A strong musical influence that Lajtha's *Magnificat* reveals is that of organ music of the Walloon-born Parisian, César Franck. Lajtha's sensitivity towards timbre, the use of particular registrations of several colours, shows the French inspiration being brought to bear on his compositional style. The many colours in his work are not only a source of enchantment but also serve to clarify his thoughts and lend refinement to the expression.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSIONS

The compositional language used in the *Magnificat* provides an example of how modern musical art can be created using the vast and rich heritage of European musical tradition. Lajtha's art shows how the human character can be revealed in modern music through an art that does not radically depart from traditions but rather relies on continuity. Lajtha's art unites some of that depth of feeling in new Hungarian music, manifested in Bartók's and Kodály's works, with the French spirit of the early twentieth century. Through the wide spectrum of his European thinking, his cultural goals, the richness of his intellect, and his profound impulses, Lajtha represents an important tendency in twentieth-century Hungarian choral art. However, it is exactly because of this abundance and rich variety of his invention that he creates problems for those who take up the cause of interpreting his *Magnificat*. The versatile juxtaposition of Impressionistic harmonies, rich polyphony, the frequent use of tempo changes and his abundant and colourful dynamic markings present a real challenge for conductors in performance. One's impression of the work upon first hearing is one primarily defined by grace, tenderness and humility. Luminous *fortes* bursting forth are rarely heard, thus giving calmness a priority over the majestic hymn-like character of other settings of the *Magnificat*. The lyrical delicacy displays the special French tone of Lajtha's style that is also evident in some of his other compositions.

This *Magnificat* is truly unlike most of the more familiar settings of the canticle text. The surface features of the work invite further investigation, which in turn reveals such contrasting elements as the cited three tones of the Gregorian *Magnificat* and the long rhapsodic organ fantasias bursting forth in occasional tone clusters, to mention only the extremes of a wide stylistic spectrum. Further

acquaintance with the piece reveals Lajtha's creative genius and rich invention so capable of uniting these elements with great sensitivity into a unique compositional language. The vast European musical heritage becomes assimilated in his musical quality thus creating, when allied with his modern ideas, a very personal musical style different from the fashion of the era in which he lived. His music bears the sign of "different."[139]

The political and cultural climate during which he composed some of his finest works failed to acknowledge his values as a composer; the result was that his works were forgotten. It was a similar fate for some of Lajtha's contemporaries such as Sándor Veress. The twentieth-century music history of Hungary is therefore "full of holes at several places."[140] "Between Béla Bartók and Emil Petrovics (b.1930) there is no Hungarian music that is widely known," Selmeczi asserts. Nor are there followers of Lajtha's musical style. Probably the music of Ferenc Farkas, whose style represents a school rooted in French tradition, stands closest to Lajtha's compositional language.

The compositional style of the *Magnificat* bears much resemblance to another religious composition of the composer's written for the combination of female voices and organ. Lajtha's *Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge* op. 65 (1958) is the composer's last piece of church music. Here Lajtha seems to be able to "translate the art of ornamentation practised by monks copying codices [into the language of music]."[141] The delicacy and tenderness of his tone are engendered by the purest springs of religious emotions. The work was premiered by Nadia Boulanger in Potsdam, New York, in 1962, the year before Lajtha's death. In that time of neglect and misery Lajtha turned his attention toward Catholic liturgy and religion, writing his religious works at a time when he could not have had any hope of hearing them widely performed. Religion must

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[139] József Ujfalussy, "Lajtha László," 4.

[140] A phrase used by György Selmeczi in the interview with Mária Albert in "A Csúnya Zenék Ideje Lejárt," *Magyar Hírlap*, 21 February 1998, 15.

[141] Breuer, *Fejezetek*, 231.

have meant consolation for the composer in those years of fear and threat, a period when he lost close contact with his own sons, who emigrated to the West; he lost his job and lived in a state of neglect. There was, however, one thing that he never lost-- Christian faith. The text of his last collected folk-song that, oddly enough, might best express the circumstances of those bitter final years:

> Let us keep true faith, we live in misery, we suffer shame, and then die.[142]

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[142] László Fábián, 375.

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APPENDIX A

TRANSLATION OF THE *MAGNIFICAT*

1. Magnificat anima mea Dominum.	1. My soul doth magnify the Lord.
2. Et exsultavit spiritus meus in deo salutari meo.	2. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
3. Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.	3. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
4. Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est, et sanctum nomen eius.	4. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His Name.
5. Et misericordia a progenie in progenies timentibus eum.	5. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation unto generation.
6. Fecit potentiam in brachio suo, dispersit superbos mente cordis sui.	6. He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
7. Deposuit potentes de sede et exaltavit humiles.	7. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.
8. Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes.	8. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.
9. Suscepit Israel puerum suum recordatus misericordiae suae.	9. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy.
10. Sicut locutus est ad Patres nostros, Abraham et semini eius in saecula.	10. As He spake to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever.
11. Gloria Patri , gloria Filio, gloria et Spiritui Sancto!	11. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
12. Sicut erat in principio et nunc et semper et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.	12. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end.
Amen.	

APPENDIX B

WORK LIST OF LAJTHA'S CHORAL COMPOSITIONS

Two Choruses op. 16 (1932) written on poems of Lajos Aprily;
Chanson et Rondel op. 23 (1936) written on poems of Charles d'Orléans;
Four Madrigals op. 29 (1939) written on poems of Charles d'Orléans;
Hol járt a dal op. 32 (1940) written on a poem by Lajos Aprily.

Missa in tono phrygio in diebus tribulationis op. 50 (1950);
Missa pro choro mixto et organo (In memoriam Alphonsi Leduc) op. 54 (1952);
Magnificat op. 60 (1954);
Trois Hymnes pour la Sainte Vierge op. 65 (1958).